IRON MAIDEN
"IT WAS LIFE-CHANGING"
NUMBER OF THE BEAST'S LEGACY AT 40

METAL HAMMER

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INTERVENTIONS.
DISEASE.
A SWAT TEAM?!

KORN
30 YEARS: ZERO CHILL

PLUS!
THE UNLIKELY RESURRECTION OF NU METAL
Starring Bizkit, Papa Roach, Mudvayne, Tetrarch & more

ALICE IN CHAINS
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VENOM PRISON
Ripping up death metal's rulebook

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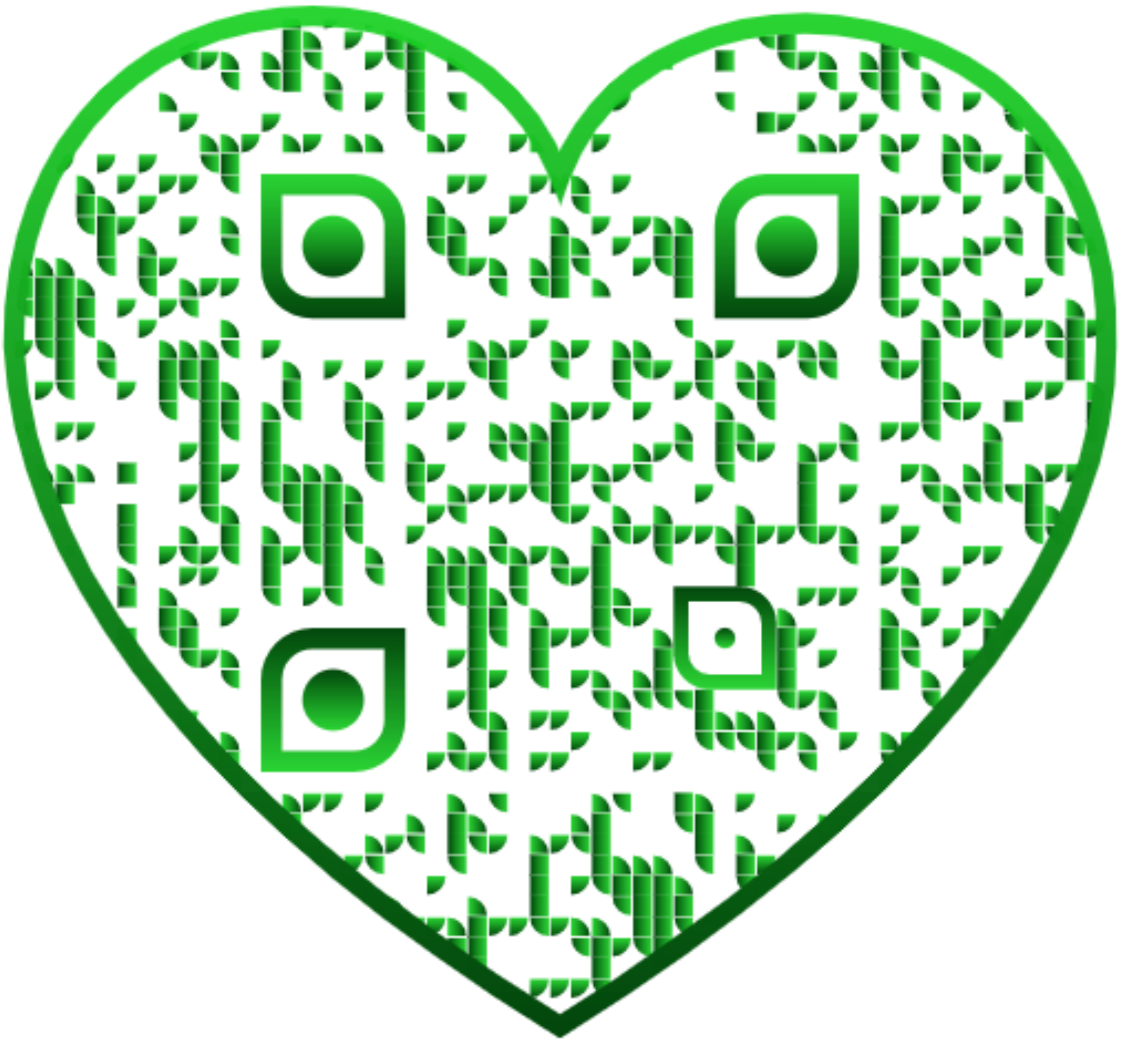
BLOODYWOOD
Inside an Indian metal phenomenon

BATHORY
The story behind a legend

PLUS! METALLICA | POWERWOLF | CASSYETTE | GOJIRA | TARJA TURUNEN | MATT PIKE



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Subscriptions
Email enquiries **help@magazinesdirect.com**
UK orderline & enquiries **0330 333 1113**
Overseas order line and enquiries **+44 330 333 1113**
Online orders & enquiries **www.magazinesdirect.com**
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Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9060

ISSN 0955-1190

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Metal Hammer (ISSN 0955-1190) March, Issue 358, is published monthly with an extra issue in April by Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK

The US annual subscription price is $194.87 Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA

Application to Mail at Periodicals Postage Prices is Pending at Brooklyn NY 11256.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Metal Hammer, World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA

Subscription records are maintained at Future Publishing, c/o Air Business Subscriptions, Rockwood House, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH. UK

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Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

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NO ONE DOES IT LIKE KORN

MORE THAN 25 YEARS since they first rumbled onto an unsuspecting metal scene to change the face of heavy music forever, Korn seemingly remain as influential now as ever. Just listen to the second track from that recent Spiritbox album if you don't believe me (and, if you want even more evidence, check out Dannii Leivers' awesome nu metal feature on page 46).

They've survived all manner of challenges, setbacks and hurdles in their time, and with uncertainty surrounding the status of Fieldy still very much in the conversation, things certainly don't seem to be smooth sailing right now (and on that note: much love to Fieldy – we hope to see you slinging that bass again soon).

All the more reason to celebrate the fact that Korn have come back swinging with another juicy selection of bouncy, neck-snapping anthems, then, sounding every bit as focused and determined as the band that emerged from Bakersfield all those years ago. Find out what's kept their fire burning in our exclusive interview on page 36.

In the meantime, stay safe and stay metal.

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MEET THE BAND

TRAVIS SHINN
PHOTOGRAPHER
Travis and legendary metal bands go together like cheddar cheese and pickle, so who better to snap this month's instantly iconic cover with Korn? No one, that's who. Doesn't it look lovely?!

DOM LAWSON
WRITER
Metal Hammer's premier Iron Maiden fanatic was but a pup when *The Number Of The Beast* took Maiden to new heights. This month, he helps us salute an all-time heavy metal classic over on p.52.

DANNII LEIVERS
WRITER
From Korn putting out a banger of a nu album to Mudvayne, Papa Roach, Limp Bizkit and more finding new leases of life, nu metal is back in a big way. We got our Dannii to investigate.

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22 GOJIRA

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THE BIG PICTURE

BURKE SHELLEY 1950-2022

LAST MONTH, THE rock world was saddened by the news that Burke Shelley, founder, vocalist and bassist of beloved Welsh heavy metallers Budgie, had died at the age of 71.

Burke formed an early version of Budgie in 1967 with drummer Ray Phillips and guitarists Kevin Newton and Brian Goddard, but it was the arrival of axeman Tony Bourge in 1968 that truly set things rolling. Burke and Tony formed a songwriting partnership that helped define the nascent metal scene – the likes of *Breadfan* and *Crash Course In Brain Surgery* became early classics of the genre (made famous to a whole new generation of metalheads courtesy of Metallica's legendary covers).

Burke's death was confirmed by his daughter, Ela, who wrote: "It is with great sadness that I announce the death of my father, John Burke Shelley. He passed away this evening in his sleep at Heath Hospital in Cardiff, his birth town. He was 71 years old."

"Thank you Burke for everything you did for heavy music," wrote Metallica's Lars Ulrich in tribute, "and much next level appreciation for co-writing and creating two songs that Metallica were honored to record over the years."

Our thoughts are with Burke's family and friends.

GETTY

THE HOT TOPIC

EVERY TIME I DIE: IS IT ALL OVER?

Rock music has been stunned by the news that, after weeks of turbulence within the band, ETID have split up

WORDS: FRASER LEWRY / MERLIN ALDERSLADE

Every Time I Die. Damn, we miss them already

METALCORE CROSSOVER KINGS Every Time I Die have stunned social media by announcing that they have effectively broken up, with four of the five members of the band confirming they had played their final show under the moniker of ETID. The surprising news, which followed weeks of issues in the band, was broken in a statement from guitarists Jordan Buckley and Andy Williams, bass player Stephen Micciche and drummer Clayton 'Goose' Holyoak. Absent from the statement was the band's singer, Keith Buckley.

The statement read, "Andy, Jordan, Steve and Goose's last show with Every Time I Die was on Dec 11, 2021. While we hoped to come to an agreed upon legal statement that outlined the truth, we were informed today of something planned to be released not mutually agreed upon that consists of inaccuracies and controls a narrative to benefit one."

"WE'RE EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTED IN HOW THIS WAS PLAYED OUT"

The statement continues: "There has been no direct communication with Keith, because it's either impossible for direct communication with him solely or we've been cut off to any and all communication by himself. Every Time I Die was these five members, and we were never budging or accepting any chances. Simply, there is zero truth about the band continuing on with a new singer.

"Lastly, we wouldn't be where we are today without every single person that's backed the band in any and all ways. While we're extremely disappointed in how this was played out online in front of you, your support and the memories we have because of you all will always be cherished."

In response, Keith Buckley shared a letter written by New York law firm Savur Law, dated in December 2021, which suggests that the other members of the band had been attempting to distance themselves from him, demanding that he should "immediately cease and desist all usage of the Band name, logo, or other intellectual property until there is a formal signed separation agreement between the parties which authorizes you to do so".

NEWS OF DISCONTENT within the Every Time I Die camp had been growing for some weeks. In December, Keith Buckley announced an impromptu hiatus from the fold during a string of US dates, explaining that "caring for my own mental health has taken priority over EVERYTHING else in my life". The rest of the band then released a statement confirming that their imminent dates would not be cancelled, but would take place without the singer, inviting fans to "come and help us finish up this tour", karaoke-style. Keith seemingly took umbrage to this news, tweeting: "Now that I have seen the 'official statement' indicating that ETID is finishing the tour without their singer, I think I'm

EVERY TIME I DIE: PRESS/MICHAEL WATSON

ready to tell you all a little bit about exactly WHY my mental health has had to become a priority over ETID."

Keith accused brother Jordan of telling "an outsider" that he had planned to replace him in the band, before suggesting that he had been isolated from the rest of his bandmates. "Traveling separately, away from alcohol and the behaviors of those who choose to drink, has brought me peace of mind and has made me the best performer I have ever been," he noted. "I love the ETID community and finally felt like I was giving back in a meaningful way, and I will continue to... being ostracized from a band I have built for 20 years because I made a decision to do whatever it took to be a good Human Being hurts me deeply, but trust me when I say I am the most mentally fit I have ever been. This decision was made to protect myself from my own sibling."

A few days later, it seemed like things were beginning to be smoothed over, with the rest of the band releasing a statement stating that "Keith Buckley is a crucial member of EVERY TIME I DIE and we apologise if our previous statement made it seem as if he was in recovery or came off as insensitive to the issues at hand. We are working on things privately now."

Sadly, things seem to have come to a head once again, and at time of going to press, it looked like ETID as we knew and loved them will be no more.

The band formed in Buffalo, New York, in 1998, and released nine critically acclaimed albums, redefining modern metalcore and influencing a tidal wave of bands in their wake. Their most recent record, *Radical*, was released in October to rave reviews, with *Metal Hammer*'s own Elliot Leaver awarding the album an 8/10 and noting: "Nearly a quarter of a century down the line and Every Time I Die are still throwing out punk anthems like they're a cinch to create; it's almost unfair on everyone else."

HEAD TO METALHAMMER.COM FOR FURTHER UPDATES ON EVERY TIME I DIE

MAIDEN: JOHN MCMURTRIE/PRESS. SNIFFER DOG: BIG JOHN

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

THIS YEAR IS STACKED FOR KILLER ALBUMS
It's only the start of February and we are drowning in loads of great music already! Hooray!

AND IT'S ONLY GONNA GET BIGGER
Slipknot! Avenged! Guns N' Roses Rammstein?! Shit's getting real.

EVERYONE WANTS A GO AT EUROVISION
The Rasmus and, er, Trollfest are the latest rock bands to throw their name in the hat. See what you've done, Måneskin?

IT'S OK TO ADMIT YOU GOT IT WRONG
Judas Priest U-turned faster on that 'four-piece' plan than Boris Johnson implementing government policy. In this case, we're definitely glad they did.

MAIDEN WANNA GO FULL *SENJUTSU*
Bruce Dickinson has confirmed the metal legends want to play the new album in full! Works for us.

Iron Maiden: full album goodness!

TOUR CANCELLATIONS STILL SUCK
We know it's still hard going out there, but keep the faith. We will get a proper live scene going again one day soon!

YOUTUBE MASH-UPS ARE STILL A THING
Slayer vs Prince! Aqua vs System Of A Down! It's all to play for.

DEEP PURPLE AND MESHUGGAH ARE FOSSILS
No, literally! Ophiopetagno Paicei and Muldaster Haakei are two 'new' fossils named after both bands' drummers.

MUSE ARE GOING METAL
Judging by recent single *Won't Stand Down*, anyway. Consider us interested...

COVID DOGS ARE METAL
Our poochy pals have been used to sniff out Covid at Tool and Metallica shows. Legends.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MONSTER MUNCH FLAVOUR?

Crisp-talk, weird sports, serious health issues and repairing old friendships – Tarja Turunen buckles up to face your burning questions

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURES: TIM TRONCKOE

SOPRANO TARJA TURUNEN has spent more than two decades merging the worlds of metal and classical. She made her name as Nightwish's vocalist and, following her very public dismissal in 2005, launched her solo career. Last year, she released her first book, *Singing In My Blood*, and introduced an electronic side-project, Outlanders. There's very little Tarja can't handle, but now she faces her biggest challenge yet: your questions.

Have you ever shattered a wine glass with your voice, deliberately or accidentally?
Kelly Trueman, (Facebook)
"I did it with a lamp. I was in a music high school, and I was vocalising in the rehearsal room. There was a light that had a problem; when I'd hit certain frequencies it started [makes a high buzzing noise]. I started playing around with it, going up and down at a very loud volume, and it just popped. I was so happy I ran down the stairs and screamed to my friends, 'Oh my God! I just broke a light with my voice! Come and see, it doesn't work any longer!'"

Who's the most surprising person that you've found out is a fan?
Debbie Bone (email)
"The writer Paulo Coelho. I've been a fan of his books since I discovered *The Alchemist*, his first book. I wrote to him because I was interested in using his text for Outlanders. His response came back like a boomerang, and he was like, 'My Muse! Oh my God!' We have been in touch ever since."

You revealed in your book that you had a stroke in 2018. How scary was that incident, and did it have any lasting effects?
Mary Guest (email)
"Luckily it didn't have any lasting effects, but it had an effect on me. It took me more or less a year to come around. Seriously, I was afraid. Every morning I woke up and every night I went to sleep, I was thinking about it. That fear is horrible because it made me realise in that fraction [of a second], I could've lost everything. I sought help, talking with a mentor every week. It was such a shock that I had this stroke because I thought I'd been living a healthy life and taking care of myself."

Tarja in her Nightwish days

What's been the most memorable or unique venue you've performed in?
@mateuszwarzycha (Twitter)
"I was performing with a symphonic orchestra in Plovdiv [in Bulgaria], it was in an outdoor amphitheatre [The Roman theatre of Philippopolis], a very historical place. I receive gifts from my fans and there are a lot of talented people amongst them. One of them sent me a painting that was from that concert and they captured it; my face, my hair, that amphitheatre. I have it on my wall in my working room."

If you could give someone one album that best demonstrates Tarja Turunen, what would it be?
Sam Petersson (Facebook)
"I'd go with my last album [2019's *In The Raw*]. That tells you who I am at the moment. Right after the stroke, I started writing the lyrics for the album and that is the reason I am choosing this album – it is absolutely raw. The whole process was very therapeutic, I thought I was not able to do it. When I sat down with my computer for the first time, it was just a blank screen

BANDSHOT: PRESS

Tarja is marked safe from wardrobe malfunctions today

“SINGING AT EUROVISION? I AM NOT INTERESTED AT ALL”

in front of me. I had all the doubts in the world, but I managed."

What's your favourite flavour of Monster Munch?
Dmartin2908 (Twitter)
"What the fuck is Monster Munch?"
***Hammer*: In all the time you've been touring the UK, no one's bought you a pack of Monster Munch?**
"I need to Google this. These things they have gluten, right? I'm allergic to gluten. My diet is quite boring but there are lots of products nowadays without gluten. I do not suffer at all."

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you want to sing at the Eurovision song contest finals?
Billy Mcgivern (email)
"If one is not at all, and 10 is absolutely, I would say less than one. I am not interested at all, and I've been asked several times [as a solo artist]. I once took part with Nightwish [in 2000] – it was not my wish, but we did it. We got into the finals in Finland, but the jury voted us out. The song was called *Sleepwalker*. It was really not something I was dreaming of doing, but it did well for the band. We got the votes from the Finnish audience, they loved us, so the band got good publicity out of it."

What's the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you onstage?
Billy Gibson (Facebook)
"It happened in Nightwish. Really early, maybe 2000 or something. My pants were this PVC material, not breathable, really horrible. I was sweating like a pig in those pants. The zip completely caught open at the front and I kept on singing like, 'What do I do, what do I do?' until the song was finished. I ran backstage to find some gaffer tape – seriously, gaffer tape – to match my shiny PVC pants. It didn't stick, and I went back to the stage and sang the rest of the concert with a towel in front. My panties were yellow. Like, really? On that day, I needed to put yellow underpants on?"

What's the hardest song to sing live?
Fitch67 (email)
"*Crimson Deep*, it has such a wide range, It's very demanding. I really need to focus when I'm singing that song. It's been a long time since I sang it – it was in the setlist many years ago. But I should take it on just to see where I'm standing vocally. I kind of enjoy the fact that not everyone can sing my songs!"

"IT WAS SUCH A SHOCK THAT I HAD A STROKE"

Those smoking lamps on the floor had it coming

Kitee is the moonshine capital of Finland. What's the most trashed you've ever got on moonshine?
Mr Stuff and Nonsense (Facebook)
"I have actually tried it – tasted it – only once in my life. It's a really hard liquor, like a vodka that was illegal back in the day."
***Hammer*: So you've never got trashed on moonshine?**
"Urgh, no!"

What's the stupidest thing you've ever read about yourself in the press?
Jan Opie (email)
"There are plenty! The one that most affected me was being named a 'diva'. I do not feel like I am a diva at all, and people that really know me are hopefully with me on this! Perhaps I was misunderstood."
***Hammer*: When did you see yourself described that way?**
"When I got fired from Nightwish, from my old colleagues. I've been able to do a lot of TV work in Finland [Tarja is a judge on Finnish version of *The Voice*] and people have really seen who I am, there is no faking when cameras are all around you all the time."

[Nightwish leader and songwriter] Tuomas Holpainen told *Metal Hammer* he was grateful to you for emailing him after his father died. Did you exchange Christmas cards this year?
Sally S, via email
"He did say thank you but no, we did not write any Christmas cards…"

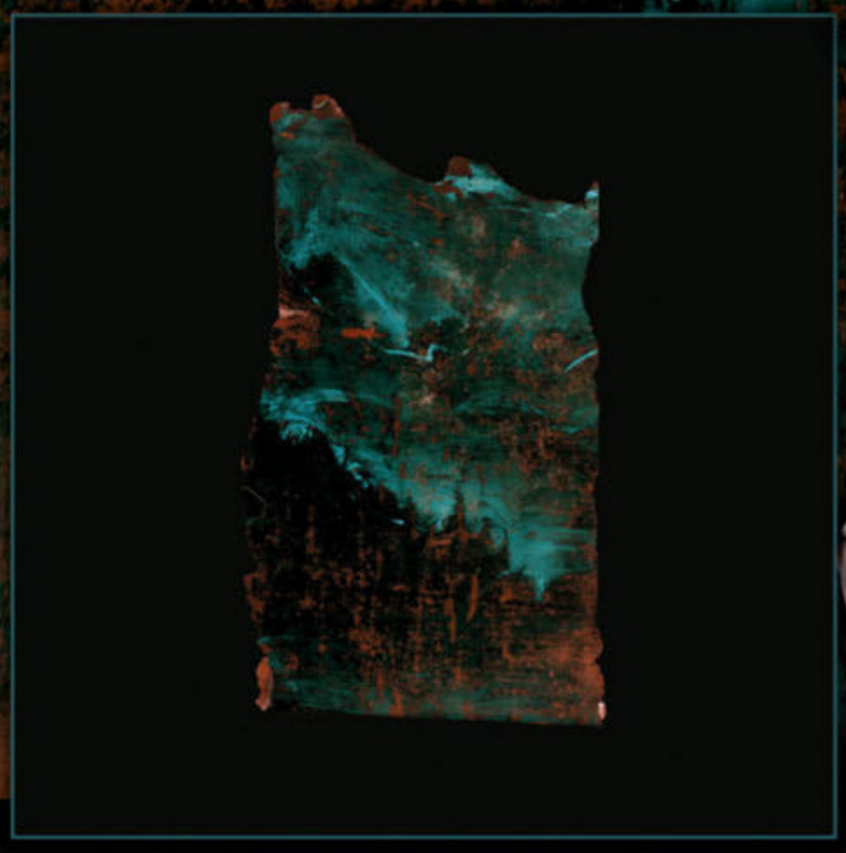
***Hammer*: Do you two have a friendly relationship now?**
"I have been singing with [ex-Nightwish bassist] Marko Hietala for many years and he apologised to me in person. He's the only one who has done that. We got to clean the table. But with Tuomas, it's been emailing time to time, but not more than that."

According to the internet, rubber boot throwing, swamp soccer and wife carrying are all actual sports in Finland. Have you tried any of them?
Dave Mardwell (Facebook)
"People go into these events and it's cracking, but I have never been in one. Of course, I've done those things with my friends at parties. We've been carrying each other, the women carrying women and men carrying men… And I'm a football fan. I support San Lorenzo, an Argentinian football team… but not in a swamp."

Will you still be doing this when you're 70, or will you have retired by then?
Sami Nieminen (Facebook)
"Absolutely yes, if there is not a severe health issue. I love music and I'm a performer, those moments I share with my audiences are the moments I live for. Look at artists like Paul McCartney. They don't need the economic support, but they still love going on tour and making music. It's in them, making them breathe. I want to be there one day as well and say I lived a happy life, with music because music gave me life."

***SINGING IN MY BLOOD* IS OUT NOW, PUBLISHED BY ROCKET 88**

CULT of LUNA



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THE SLAYLIST

EVA KORMAN

Rolo Tomassi's screamer-in-chief scrolls through her playlists and pulls up math-metal noise, epic indie rock and 80s pop bangers

WORDS: ROSIE SOLOMON

Variety is the spice of life for Eva

"I FIRST CAME across **AT THE DRIVE-IN** when I was 13 and [Eva's brother/Rolo Tomassi keyboard player and co-vocalist] Jamie brought a CD home. I'd never heard anything like it before. Cedric Bixler-Zavala is probably my most influential frontperson, from his voice, to his lyrics, to his stage presence. *Cosmonaut* in particular captures their energy so well and it's one of my favourite tracks from the *Relationship Of Command* album.

Similarly, I always come back to **CIRCLE TAKES THE SQUARE** as a reference point. *Non Objective Portrait Of Karma* has this fantastic build-up of energy. They're a band who have the whole package - the lyrics, the art, the sound… And they have a male guitarist and female bass player, which acted as kind of a template for us of call-and-response vocal patterns. It inspired us to think that we can layer up completely different vocal styles in the mix to create this really unique texture.

ALKALINE TRIO were one of my first musical loves. I heard *From Here To Infirmary* when I was 11 - one of the first alternative rock records I heard. I just fell in love with it, and *Mr. Chainsaw* is one of my favourite songs. They were also one of the first bands I saw live, when I was 12 or 13, and I'm going to get tickets for their 25th anniversary tour next year as well! That'll be such a lovely, coming-full-circle moment.

When I first joined Rolo Tomassi I had just started listening to **PRETTY GIRLS MAKE GRAVES**. Hearing Andrea Zollo was one of the first times I'd heard heavier female vocals. *Speakers Push The Air* is so catchy as well - it's just a fun song about loving music! When I was 14 and just joined Rolo Tomassi, I listened to *Speakers…* and it gave me the confidence to think that this was something I could actually do.

The first time I heard *Appointments* by **JULIEN BAKER** it gave me chills. To write so honestly and openly about something that is so personal is really hard to do and it hits really close to home in an absolutely devastating way.

"BELINDA CARLISLE WROTE ONE OF THE BEST CHORUSES OF ALL TIME"

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THE BLOOD BROTHERS are another band that have been very inspiring for us, in terms of their vocal arrangements. There's so much going on! Listening to them will always put me in a good mood, they're very playful and I get a lot of inspiration from that.

My husband and I absolutely love 80s pop. When we go on a road trip or any long drive, I'll put on one of my many playlists that are just exclusively 80s pop and *Heaven Is A Place On Earth* by **BELINDA CARLISLE** is on all of them! It's one of my favourite pop songs ever, and it's a singalong car staple. It's instantly recognisable as soon as it starts and it's got one of the best choruses of all time.

From Belinda Carlisle to **THE DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN**! Our band wouldn't exist without them. I remember James and I watching their performance of *Sugar Coated Sour* at the Virgin Megastore on the family computer. The song kicks in and Greg runs out over everyone's heads. They have just consistently been that live band that blows you away every time. We had the pleasure of touring with them in 2010, and getting to see them play every night was just incredible.

HOP ALONG have been a band that I've just admired for years. Frances Quinlan is one of my favourite vocalists ever. Their voice is so unique and amazing, the dynamics are just incredible. They're such a talented songwriter as well, and Hop Along just always sound so distinctive. I'm absolutely desperate to see them live - from videos it seems their live vocals are just as incredible as they sound on record.

MANCHESTER ORCHESTRA's *The Million Masks Of God* was one of my favourite records this year and I was eagerly awaiting *Bed Head* - their first single - because I'd loved their previous record so much. I was worried about how they'd top it because it's one of my favourites but they just didn't disappoint. They are really at their peak and just going from strength to strength with each album." H

ROLO TOMASSI'S NEW ALBUM, *WHERE MYTH BECOMES MEMORY*, IS RELEASED ON FEBRUARY 4 VIA MNRK

PRESS

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LIFE LESSONS

MATT PIKE

The nine-toed stoner metal icon on juvenile delinquency, military school and his Olympic-level weed intake

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

MATT PIKE HELPED codify stoner metal as a genre in the 90s with his band Sleep and their landmark releases *Holy Mountain* and *Dopesmoker* (aka *Jerusalem*), before launching the no-less-celebrated High On Fire. Along the way, there have been struggles with booze (he's not sober) and even an amputated toe. With his first ever solo album, *Pike Vs The Automaton*, on the horizon, we asked Matt to guide us through the lessons that helped turn him into a modern metal icon.

I WAS A REAL PROBLEM CHILD…

"By 14 I was doing drugs and stealing booze from my parents, throwing parties and getting into girls pants; all the things a shitty kid does. We'd take LSD and drink Jim Beam all over downtown Denver. I got into a little thieving ring run by some older guys; I was a skinny kid so I could stick my arm through tight spaces to open doors or whatever, so we'd go stealing cars and driving around."

GETTING CAUGHT WAS THE BEST THING THAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED FOR ME

"I ended up going to juvenile hall for a while, then got sent to military school. My dad was just like, 'You didn't do enough time, dude.' I wasn't charged for grand theft auto, it was charges like criminal trespassing and whatever – just enough to get me a bunch of probation and time. It got me to California though, and once I moved in with my dad he was able to enforce rules that my mom never really could. I shaped up and tried a little harder, did better in school for the last year."

MILITARY SCHOOL TAUGHT ME THE BENEFITS OF HAVING A ROUTINE

"Military school was very physical. When I first got there I couldn't do a push-up, let alone a set. By the end of it I could do 200 easy, because that's all I'd do all day when I'd get into trouble for not doing anything. But it was very structured, operating like a regular school during the day but with three set meals. Certain kids paid to be there for that kind of regimented education."

A HEALTHY MUSIC SCENE MEANS BETTER BANDS CAN GROW

"We were spoiled in Berkeley, I got to see stuff like Neurosis playing with Melvins, with like 15 people attending and it was the loudest thing in the world. We'd see some amazing gigs at [legendary punk venue] Gilman Street, we had all these cool half-crossover bands that were part-punk and part-metal, with us going up in [Matt and future Sleep bandmate Al Cisneros's original band] Asbestosdeath when we were little kids."

SOMETIMES PERSONNEL CHANGES WORK OUT FOR THE BEST

"The first Sleep album [*Volume 1*] was basically all about transitioning from Asbestosdeath into Sleep. Nobody was getting along towards the end of Asbestosdeath – people were going to end up killing each other – so a decision had to be made. Then Justin [Marler, Astrodeath guitarist] became a monk not long after we recorded the album, up on Kodiak Island [in Alaska]. There's a weird aura around Sleep for sure, this almost occult thing where it feels like its own religion."

FINDING OUR OWN VOICE ALLOWED SLEEP TO REALLY PUSH BOUNDARIES

"A lot of *Holy Mountain* was working out what we wanted to bring to the table. There was obvious worship for Black Sabbath, but we were also listening to a whole lot of dub and smoking endless amounts of pot. That carried on right through to *Jerusalem*, which was an incredibly difficult album to make. Because of the reels and tapes we'd use, we could only record for maybe 22 minutes at a time. We ended up going up to the woods to write and record a lot of it, but ended up coming back home so we could rewrite a lot of a song, then go back again to try recording it again. There was a lot of fighting going on with that album, so much emotion and energy was going into it that inevitably we'd clash."

"I WAS DIGGING DITCHES FOR PENNIES"

I'VE DEFINITELY BEEN A TOKE OVER THE LINE MORE THAN ONCE

"Sleep were smoking so much pot it was ridiculous. We toured Europe with Cathedral and Penance, which was fun but also not great because we weren't getting paid anything. We couldn't get anything to smoke in England either, so by the time we got to Holland it was like, 'Do we buy food or weed?' 'Weed, dude!'"

MOST OF MY ALBUMS ARE SLOW-BURNERS

"People didn't get Sleep at first. At that point, Florida's death metal scene was really taking off, so the idea was to find bands like Cannibal Corpse, not Black Sabbath. Later High On Fire went on the Sounds Of The Underground tour with all these big metal bands of the time and people just didn't know how to take us. It takes a while to sink in I think!"

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS JUST WING IT

"The experience of getting *Jerusalem* out was so difficult that I'm sure it made each of us better for future bands, as we knew what we were dealing with after that. We realised it was harder to do something like that without being prepared. The essential reason why people have deadlines is so they actually finish something rather than keep tweaking it. I'm really organised now it comes to recording – it looks like a fuckin' formula on a math board at MIT at times!"

YOU CAN'T LET SETBACKS BEAT YOU

"I was digging ditches for pennies after Sleep broke up. It made me strong though, and I was kickboxing and doing other martial arts at the time. I was also drinking lots and playing pool, because the work was so gruelling. Any extra time I had I got a band together and started writing songs. I wasn't gonna lie down and die; I got the guys from High On Fire together over about six months and got to writing."

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

"I started taking my vocal practice serious when I joined Kalas. My friends had started this band and I could just hear all these ideas straight away. The bassist [Brad Reynolds] was like my little brother, we were inseparable. I'd go to band practice every day after work."

TRYING DIFFERENT THINGS KEEPS THINGS FRESH

"[Sleep's comeback album] *The Sciences* was the best release ever. We put one Morse code ▶

PRESS/JEN ROSENSTEIN

Matt Pike: setbacks? Pah!

Whips, axes and gongs just out of shot

message out that just gave details of when we were in the studio, then didn't put anything else out for a while. Then we just surprise dropped it on 4/20, which also happened to be Record Store Day, so people went crazy for it. That's the fun thing about Sleep – we always liked to fuck with people, try weird shit and see if people understood."

"SLEEP WERE SMOKING SO MUCH POT IT WAS RIDICULOUS"

YOU'LL GET BY WITH HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS

"I can't say I haven't been weak and gone to get a drink somewhere or whatever – I'm the habitual slipper – but it's all about keeping it under control. There's a lot more I can do when I can focus this energy somewhere. It's good to have people around you who care about you and try to motivate you – those are your true friends. If a friend sees you going down the wrong path, they're like, 'Come play some basketball', or 'Come throw some axes in the forest' or whatever."

STAYING BUSY WILL KEEP YOU OUT OF TROUBLE

"I self-destruct if I'm not doing something – I think too hard and try to do too much at once, it's an ADHD thing. I was on Ritalin for it as a kid, so it's something I've dealt with for a long time but my wife was the one who really helped push me into doing other things during the pandemic so I wasn't going crazy. I'll complain to her that she's nagging too much, but later I'm like, 'I'm so glad you did that.'"

SOMETIMES YOU'VE GOT TO CUT AND RUN

"When I got my toe amputated [in 2018, due to a bone infection], it had got to a point where it was just like, 'It's causing me all this pain and misery, get rid of it.' Don't beat a dead horse – if something's not working, move on to something else. Who knows, you might come back and find the horse is actually still alive. That's how I looked at the Sleep break-up, to any issues with High On Fire, right up to now."

YOU SHOULD NEVER BE AFRAID TO GET CREATIVE

"I love *Pike Vs The Automaton*. We didn't write it like a normal album. I'd be tracking all this different stuff and had all the time in the world to cut all this stuff together. There's a lot of percussion in there – I gave everybody mushrooms then got them to run around hitting things like gongs with axes and whips."

***PIKE VS THE AUTOMATON* IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 18 VIA MNRK HEAVY**

PRESS/JEN ROSENSTEIN

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IN THE STUDIO

DEVIN TOWNSEND

Prog-metal's busiest maverick is letting go of his control-freak tendencies on new album *Lightwork*

WORDS: MATT MILLS

Good to see the stresses of the last couple of years haven't changed Hevy Devy in any way

DEVIN TOWNSEND ISN'T about to relinquish his title as The Hardest Working Person In Metal any time soon. After the recent surprise-released *The Puzzle* and *Snuggles* albums, he's back working on the follow-up proper to 2019's kaleidoscopic *Empath*. Titled *Lightwork*, it sees Devin working with an outside producer – Garth Richardson (RATM/Mudvayne) – for the first time ever, just to see what would happen…

You've said that you've challenged yourself with *Lightwork*. How so?
"Every record that I've ever done, I've produced myself. It's kind of a vacuum, without anyone saying, 'Hey, you might want to reconsider that' or 'Maybe that's a little bit too far up your own ass.' So, I've wanted to work with a producer for a long time, if for no other reason than to see what'd happen. It's been intense, because the person I've chosen to work with is a good friend of mine; he's an incredible producer with a long history."

Did you pick Garth because he's a good mate, or was there more to it than that?
"I've tried working with other producers and it didn't end well. Their way of producing was to put me into a mould, and it doesn't work. It just ends up being a version of me that I'm embarrassed of. But, because I've known Garth for so long, his method of production became more like one of those retractable leashes that you have dogs on. You can run and run, but, after you get to a certain point, he's like, 'No! Hold back there!'"

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
21

STUDIO:
The Farm, Vancouver, Canada

PRODUCER:
Garth Richardson

EXPECT:
A streamlined collection of dramatic, melodic and progressive metal

***Empath* was the Devin Townsend-iest Devin Townsend album. When you started work on *Lightwork*, were there thoughts of, "What do I do now?!"?**
"No, musical constipation is rarely a problem for me. I just wrote 50 or 60 songs and kept showing them to Garth: 'What about this one?' 'Nope!' 'This one?' 'Nope!' 'What about this one?' 'I really like the chorus, but not the verse.' So, it's a really strong record."

You've said that *Lightwork* will be a "weird" album…
"No, it's not weird. *Lightwork* is clear and direct."

So it's more streamlined than *Empath*?
"Totally. If I do something eclectic, the next thing tends to be more straightforward, then, after something more straightforward, it gets weird again. Garth was also very conscious of making sure it wasn't just one thing. He wanted to get a heavy song in there; he wanted to get a couple of melodic songs in there; he wanted to get a weird couple of songs in there. So, it's a pretty comprehensive thing."

So it's both streamlined *and* eclectic?
"Yeah, but it's also really great to hear. There have been some things that the audience have been asking me for for years that, for whatever reason, I have denied them. I did a Twitch stream and asked, 'Is there anything you'd like to request of Garth for this record?' Everyone was like, 'Turn up the vocals!' So, for *Lightwork*, I was like, 'As long as I can get behind what I'm saying, then sure! Turn them up!'"

So what *are* you saying on this album?
"I don't know! Ha ha ha! I think I'm looking around at all the chaos and depression and suicides and all these sorts of things. I've always been of the mindset that music doesn't come from musicians; it exists in the aether, and you try and drag it out. I just hope that there's some inspiration or strength that can be taken from it. Don't give up, I guess that's the whole point."

So will this be the best Devin Townsend album?
"I think they're all kind of shit, depending on my mood. It's the best version of Devin Townsend that I can be right now. It's marginally better than it was a couple years ago, but it's also more tired." H

***LIGHTWORK* WILL BE OUT IN THE SECOND HALF OF 2022 VIA INSIDEOUT**

PRESS

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METAL HAMMER

THE STORY BEHIND

FLYING WHALES
GOJIRA

It's the modern metal masterpiece that put France's finest on the map. But Joe Duplantier has a very different view of it

WORDS: MATT MILLS

THERE ARE A multitude of things that set Gojira apart from so many of their contemporaries. There's the French band's groundbreaking, environmentally conscious lyricism, with singer/guitarist Joe Duplantier often screaming for the salvation of a polluted world. There's the mix of technicality and brute force of Mario Duplantier's intricate drumming against hulking riffs inspired by everything from death metal to nu metal. And there's their ability to conjure inventive melodies, something backed up by the millions of Spotify streams amassed by hook-laden singles such as *Silvera* and *Stranded*.

All three came together perfectly on *Flying Whales*, the 2005 anthem that has become one of their signature songs. The seven-minute behemoth – originally from Gojira's third album, *From Mars To Sirius* – plummets from a hummable introduction to bouncing death metal, before Joe roars about the wonders of ocean life over a torrent of breakdowns.

The song turned out to be Gojira's moment of self-actualisation and its omnipresence in their setlist for the last 17 years has gifted it with life beyond even their control. Gig-goers regularly bring inflatable whales to gigs and chuck them about, and there's even a Facebook fan group called Gojira Whaleposting with some 20,000 members. There's only one downside: Joe Duplantier doesn't particularly like *Flying Whales* very much.

"It starts with a super-duper long intro that, honestly, if I'm going to listen to the song, I skip," he tells *Hammer* with a laugh. "It's such a drag! "It leads into that main riff, which dictates the tempo of the song. To this day, we don't understand what's so special about that riff, but Mario has a million theories. He says that *Flying Whales* is the perfect tempo. That's why it's successful, because it [matches] the average human heartbeat. Then the lyrics are like this crazy, mystical bum that lives in a cave and says, 'Oh, I wanna reach the whales!' It's so weird. I'm kind of pissed, because these are not my favourite lyrics and there's something clumsy about the song; it has a million breakdowns. When we play it every night, I'm wondering, 'What's up with this song? Why do people want to hear this song?'"

Joe may lament the lyrics of *Flying Whales* making him sound like "a fucking hippie", but the fact remains that the song's awe at the miracles of nature perfectly fits his values and upbringing. He and his brother Mario, five years his junior, grew up in the rural Landes forest, two hours from Bordeaux in the south-west of France. Joe used to pass the time collecting wood and stones at the beach, only to come home with hands blackened by crude oil. Even worse, Mario once went to hospital with an ear infection after swimming in polluted water. As the pair grew older and discovered rock and metal, they attended gigs in the nearby Basque Country, which was fighting a perennial battle for independence from France and Spain.

"There was some 'mild' terrorism going on," Joe recalls. "They were exploding cars and banks and real estate. There was an ongoing war between the French and Spanish police and these Basque terrorists, so there was this climate of tension. Bands would do underground shows in somebody's garage or somebody's barn. Even though I didn't share the whole 'independence of the Basque Country' [stance], I got to witness this electric dimension of rock and punk music that had a purpose."

Gojira's 2001 debut album, *Terra Incognita*, and 2003 follow-up *The Link* combined brutal death metal with spiritually inclined lyrics that pondered meditation and the course of life. "My political consciousness wasn't activated yet," admits Joe. By the time of *From Mars To Sirius*, that was starting to change. Their love of nature and increasing desire to make music to instigate social action began to shift front and centre – something manifested on *Flying Whales*.

The frontman was inspired to write *Flying Whales*' lyrics when he read that ocean-based mammals, such as whales and dolphins, have some of the most complex brains in the world.

Gojira: cetaceously heavy

PRESS

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
2005

ALBUM:
From Mars To Sirius

PERSONNEL:
Joe Duplantier (vocals/guitars), Mario Duplantier (drums), Christian Andreu (guitars), Jean-Michel Labadie (bass)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
N/A

"This book said that whales, like humans, have an incredible amount of grey matter compared to other animals," he explains. "So, what do they do? They don't build houses, roads or prisons. They don't have laws, don't read books, don't make movies. Why are they so smart? Maybe we're missing something."

While honouring these mysteriously intelligent cetaceans, Joe holds a mirror to mankind: the species that hunts them for their meat and blubber. *'Beneath the seas I searched and had a different view of us on Earth; the sinking ship of man,'* he growls during the second verse. It neatly fits the over-arching theme of *From Mars To Sirius*: not only is there a flying whale emblazoned on the album's cover but, lyrically, it's fixated on the belief that we must reject violence to evolve.

"Mars is the Roman god of war and Sirius is a star that, in some cultures, represents love and peace," Joe elaborates. "Going from the masculine energy of Mars to the more feminine and peaceful Sirius is what humanity needs to do in order to survive."

"I SKIP THE SUPER-DUPER LONG INTRO. IT'S SUCH A DRAG!"

Although the band's messaging evolved, *Flying Whales*' music is a result of Gojira doing what they always did: jamming in the Duplantiers' house until they stumbled upon something cool. When Joe slid his fingers from the fifth fret of his guitar to the first, the quartet instantly leapt on the sound and composed the simplest yet heaviest of riffs around it. It proved emblematic of an album that, guitar-wise, became the least complicated Gojira had done at that point, de-emphasising tremolo picking in favour of pick scrapes, melodic taps and seismic chords.

"There's a nu metal vibe," Joe concurs. "I think Gojira dwell somewhere between Morbid Angel and Korn. We had a lot of fun playing with those two elements, often in the same riff: death metal and whatever Sepultura invented with *Chaos A.D.*. The *Flying Whales* riff came from a pulse, a mood, that happened organically in the rehearsal space."

Meanwhile, that atmospheric opening – the one that Joe today considers skippable – was necessitated simply by the song's placement midway through the album. "We try to balance out the pace of every record by putting in a song with a calm

If Gojira aren't on your sonar, you're missing out big time

"I ACTUALLY DISLIKE INFLATABLE WHALES AT OUR SHOWS"

intro," explains Joe. "That's what every musician is probably doing when they release an album; maybe after six songs, they're like, 'OK, this is too much! We need to slow things down so we can come back and strike again.'"

Despite being held up today as the band's earliest masterpiece, *From Mars...* proved more of a creeping infestation than a meteoric smash hit. Released on underground label Listenable and too monolithic for rock radio, its success came on the back of Gojira's live shows, which were as frequent as they were intense. "We're definitely a live band," states Joe. "We record albums and then we just tour, tour, tour. We never said no to a tour for 20 years."

Such a prolific schedule has only made *Flying Whales* more and more of a Gojira mainstay; in turn, Joe has only grown more and more perplexed. "When I talk to fans, they say, 'If you don't play that song, I'm going to shoot myself in the face'," he laughs. "There are so many other songs that are way better than this one! I think it has something to do with the title. The image of a flying whale has caught people's attention, like, 'What?!' It became this gimmick for our entire career."

Indeed, ever since the singer painted a planet-sized white whale and plastered it on the front cover of *From Mars...*, the image has been inseparable from Gojira. A legion of devotees have the artwork as a tattoo. Plus, the connection between the band and the animal has been the inspiration for countless memes all over social media, no doubt fuelling the song's status as a live must-see. Joe himself has mixed feelings about the unexpected life the song has taken on.

"I actually dislike fans bringing inflatable whales to shows," he says. "I'm trying to express something spiritual and otherworldly, and it ends up being a bunch of plastic objects thrown at people. When I look at this paradox, I'm cringing a little bit. But that's personal. This band is not my band; it's everybody's band. They want to come to the show, have fun and do their own thing."

GOJIRA TOUR THE UK IN MARCH WITH ALIEN WEAPONRY AND EMPLOYED TO SERVE. THEIR LATEST ALBUM, *FORTITUDE*, IS OUT NOW VIA ROADRUNNER

PRESS

Black Lodge PROUDLY PRESENTS

VINTERLAND – Welcome My Last Chapter

Official re-release of this classic melodic black metal masterpiece from the mid 90's! Recorded at Unisound Studios in 1995, now re-mastered by Dan Swanö.

CD | CASSETTE | BLACK VINYL | PURPLE VINYL | DIGITAL

URFERD – Resan

URFERD signifies the beginning of a new and additional musical chapter for its founder and sole member, Daniel Beckman (TWILIGHT FORCE, AGES), and brings a refreshing new perspective to the genre, challenging the boundaries of dark atmospheric folk music.

The first album "RESAN" is a musical odyssey in both a literal and figurative sense. The album takes the listener on a journey through dark and olden Nordic forests; where strife and hardships follows in our steps, yet where the beauty and vastness of the solemn Nordic landscape persists and permeates. From the album opening's depiction of a serene morning's dawn to the closing track's respite of a hearth at nightfall, RESAN traverses a multitude of captivating musical landscapes and themes throughout its eight songs.

For fans of: Wardruna, Heilung, Forndom, Myrkur, Garmarna, Loreena McKennitt.

CD | VINYL | DIGITAL

ORDER FROM: SOUNDPOLLUTION.SE

BLACKLODGERECORDS.BANDCAMP.COM | FACEBOOK.COM/BLACKLODGERECORDS

YOUR SHOUT

I'M OBSESSED WITH ZEAL & ARDOR

...and some other melodramatic exclamations you decided to send our way this month!

Zeal & Ardor's Manuel Gagneux: cover-worthy

YOUNG BLOOD

So happy to see Spiritbox on the cover of *Metal Hammer*! Courtney deserves it and it's surely only a matter of time before they're headlining festivals.
Jess McMunn (Facebook)

We have to agree! Spiritbox's hype is real, and it's time to believe the hype. The sky's the limit for Courtney and the lads, for sure.

ZEAL OF APPROVAL

I have to admit, I hadn't given Zeal & Ardor much attention when I saw they'd made the cover of *Metal Hammer*, but I'm now obsessed. Who says rock is dead when it's being as innovative as this?!
Owen Phillips (Facebook)

Manuel is one of the most unique minds in the game right now, there's absolutely no doubt about that. And if you haven't heard that new album, get it in your ears ASAP.

DON'T SLEEP ON IT

Fair play for managing to get a cover feature out of *Sleep Token* without actually interviewing the band. I'm almost impressed. Will flannel-face ever actually say anything in print?
Jason Reeves (email)

He's a mysterious fella, is our old pal Vessel. We reckon we can crack him, we just need to find something he can't resist talking about. Dinosaurs? Everyone likes dinosaurs.

Spiritbox's Courtney LaPlante: believe the hype!

YOUTH OF THE NATION

So great to see young bands getting these January covers. New metal bands need our support more than ever and Spiritbox, Loathe, Zeal & Ardor and Sleep Token are all so unique and interesting. Can we have this more than once a year?
Matt Hobens (email)

More young bands on covers? Sounds good to us! It's not exactly like we're short of options right now...

BEER AND LOATHING

Loathe sound like a good bunch of dudes. If a band makes lovely music but also seem like the kinda lads that you could take to a pub, it's an easy win for me.
George Morton (email)

Nice one, George. Ours is a Lemmy. Wait, what do you mean we're not invited? George?! GEORGE!

KORN STUPID

Korn have a new album out and for the second record in a row they don't get a cover? Are you guys high?
Stephen Perowne (Facebook)

Patience is a virtue, Stephen. Look at what you're holding in your hands right now! Happy yet?

#TWEETS

When developing setlists, bands should have a scout in the audience paying attention to the number of phones that come out for each song. Lots of phones? Keeper. No phones? Next!
Chris Kael, Five Finger Death Punch (@5FDPChrisKael)

News flash bozos, we never stop writing.
Dan Searle, Architects (@danarchitects)

Daily Game: Your ability to take an 'L' and recover quickly must be mastered.
Ice T, Body Count (@FINALLEVEL)

Strange = Superpower
Lzzy Hale, Halestorm (@LZZYHALE)

Hey all, thinking of you. Hope you have a good day :)
Devin Townsend **(@dvntownsend)**

SPIRITBOX: PRESS/TRAVIS SHINN. ZEAL & ARDOR: DEREK BREMNER.

Loathe: getting the beers in?

Probably not if you're being angry on Facebook all the time, but we do try, promise.

NO FUCKING TAKERS

Is anyone else already sick to death of NFTs? I refuse to believe any fans actually give a shit. This is some weak, capitalistic bullshit. Enough.
Sean Harbron (Facebook)

***Calmly puts away our *Metal Hammer* Friend Club NFT pitch*. We're kidding, we're kidding – we have no plans to get in on the NFT game right now. It seems to be an inevitable part of the art landscape for now, but who knows if it will all still be here in a few years' time?**

CROWN PAYMENT BLUES

Does Prince William liking AC/DC make Prince William cooler or AC/DC lamer?
Alice Soron (Facebook)

We don't think there is a single thing in the history, present or future of planet Earth that could make AC/DC lame. It's just not possible, so don't worry about it.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Can a mosh-retired 40-cough-something metal fan justify going to Reading Festival and sitting through a day of stuff I don't like to go and see Rage Against The Machine one more time?
Luke Pattinson (Facebook)

We'd sit through most things to watch Rage Against The Machine live, quite frankly. Although with Run The Jewels supporting, you're guaranteed at least an extra hour or so of heavy bangers.

PREDICTABLE TRAIN

Hammer picked *Crazy Train* as the greatest Ozzy Osbourne song ever and I cannot think of anything more predictable. That cheesy verse shouldn't be getting near the top of anyone's list.
Adam Martin (Facebook)

It's at the very least, objectively, Ozzy's most famous song, so *someone* clearly likes it! Anyway, it was a reader vote, so if you want to blame someone, best blame, er, yourselves! Sorry!

THE BIG DEBATE

When it was recently revealed by Billboard that no new rock or metal albums made the top 200 selling records of 2021 in the States, you all had some very strong thoughts about it.

WE SAID

"And the biggest-selling rock album of 2021 in the United States? That'll be Queen's *Greatest Hits*, first released in 1981, which registers on the list at No.23, one place higher than Machine Gun Kelly's 2020 album *Tickets To My Downfall*."

YOU SAY

Who cares? Rock music doesn't need smoke blown up its ass by Billboard or anyone. Metal is underground, and it can stay there and be fine.
Jase Collins (Facebook)

I'm honestly quite surprised by that given that Iron Maiden released a new album this year. Surely enough people would buy and stream that to make a difference?
Scott Williams (Facebook)

Metal is nowhere near the level of commercialism it was in the early 2000s. There's no point trying to chase chart positions any more.
James Lambert (Facebook)

Am I allowed to say I liked the Olivia Rodrigo album? I have no beef with Paramore-sounding songs, alright?!
Anna Foy (Facebook)

I don't know what to do with this information.
Bryan C. Copeland (Facebook)

Rock doesn't need the mainstream and the mainstream doesn't need rock music. So who actually gives a shit?
Di Brant (Facebook)

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

VENOM PRISON

Erebos

"Consider the ceiling smashed. Venom Prison just found a new gear"

MERLIN ALDERSLADE
EDITOR

BLOODYWOOD

Rakshak

"Nu metal x Bollywood x all the posi vibes"

ELEANOR GOODMAN
DEPUTY EDITOR

SHAPE OF DESPAIR

Return To The Void

"A spellbinding beauty glimpsed only in the darkest of hours"

JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

SPIRITBOX

Eternal Blue

"Yep, it's still on loop. *Eternal Blue* is a stunning album"

VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

SLEEP TOKEN

This Place Will Become Your Tomb

"Revisited this; it's still as mesmerising as it was on my first listen"

LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

HAMMERFALL

Hammer Of Dawn

"The world might be crazy, but Hammerfall just keep on Hammerfallin'"

DAVE EVERLEY
FREELANCE NEWS EDITOR

LOATHE: JOHN McMURTRIE

NEW NOISE

CASSYETTE

She went from writing rock anthems to serving up electronic bangers. And now the electro-metal provocateur is smashing those two worlds together

WORDS: TYLER DAMARA KELLY

CASSYETTE IS FAR from a newcomer to the music industry. Back in the middle of the last decade, she was a DJ who had the knack for getting a room moving with her blend of Miami disco, 80s synth-pop and deep house. Secretly, though, she was also a metal-obsessed musician who wanted to start moshpits. Now, several years on, Cassyette has found freedom as a genre-straddling provocateur smashing those two worlds together, marrying metal, rock and electronic music with acrobatic vocals that can switch from a whisper to a fearsome roar.

"When you're told that things are wrong, and you're put in a box, that's no way to live," she says of her crossing-the-beams approach. "It's liberating to be able to say 'Fuck you.'"

It's the morning after she opened for Willow Smith at London's Electric Ballroom, and the Essex-born singer – real name: Cassy Brooking – is wearing last night's make-up and a Cheshire Cat grin. Her elation is understandable; 2021 saw her make her festival debut at Download Pilot, collaborate with Frank Carter (on electro-punk anthem *Off With His Head*), bag BBC Radio 1's Hottest Record accolade (for recent single *Behind Closed Doors*) and amass a million followers on TikTok.

The freedom in her music is the sound of someone who finally feels like they can live their life authentically. Cassyette went to an all-girls Catholic school, and being in an incredibly strict environment – "especially as a queer person" – led to her feeling suppressed for most of her early life.

"It was very difficult for a lot of people who went to that school," she says. It was pretty religious and I think people went one way or another. I certainly went the other way…" she adds with a laugh.

Her rebellious streak was forged early on, when she discovered rock and metal at the age of 13: Paramore, Korn, Black Sabbath and, unexpectedly, Mötley Crüe. "I have always been obsessed with glam and hair metal because it's theatrical and fun," she says. "It's a bit weird of a weird mix but Mötley Crüe are one of my favourite bands of all time."

Taking inspiration from the leather-clad libertines in particular and the raucousness of rock'n'roll in general, the seeds of Cassyette were sown. Her neighbour was a producer with "an insane guitar collection" who was looking for a female vocalist. "I did quite a lot of stuff with him," she says, "and I've been on a bit of a journey just writing and making different styles of music ever since."

After filling in for DJs at bars she used to work in, Cassyette realised she could make a living from it. Enrolling on a music course at Westminster University, she began writing and producing songs in her bedroom, uploading them to Soundcloud. In 2018 she released *Push N Pull* – a synth-based pop anthem with a vintage twist. "I started producing with my mate and I found that way easier than making a rock song," she admits. "The easiest music to produce is dance music."

As her career as a DJ took off, Cassyette began to neglect the music that she had grown up listening to. But the further she moved away from her rock, metal and alternative roots, the more she craved it. "I've always wanted to be a rock singer," she says. "I was definitely missing it when I was DJing and I think I was doing things for the wrong reasons."

Cassyette realised that she wanted reinvent herself. Her 2019 single *Jean*, with its seamless blend of slinky guitar solos, cinematic synths and gravelly vocals, signalled what was to come, while the industrial metal-tinged chorus of follow-up single *Petrichor* – *'Ready for revival, I want to be reborn'* – summarised her intentions. The transition from club DJ to alternative singer may seem like quite a jump, but Cassyette is adamant that her sound sits right in the middle of the two.

"I think it is just as electronic as it is rock. In the beginning I was making pure rock music, then I went into the electronic world, but now the two are merged," she says. "Tylr [Rydr] and Olly [Burden], who I make the music with, are very similar to me in terms of the sounds we like. We've developed this really specific sound that is so key to Cassyette. It doesn't matter if it's more pop-heavy or rock-heavy, it's always in the middle of electronic and rock."

Authenticity is fuelling this next step on Cassyette's journey. If she can make someone feel better about themselves, then she believes that she's done her job properly.

"I think anyone can write a song about popping pills and fucking bitches, but what good is that in the long run?" she asks, slipping in another chuckle. "People have been so depressed in the past few years and I think everyone is gagging for a sense of normality. Being human, you just want to feel connected. Music was something that made me feel less alone and I think music is the best way to connect with people because, at the end of the day, we're all feeling the same."

"WHEN YOU'RE PUT IN A BOX…THAT'S NO WAY TO LIVE"

CASSYETTE'S UK TOUR BEGINS ON FEBRUARY 17 IN LONDON

PRESS

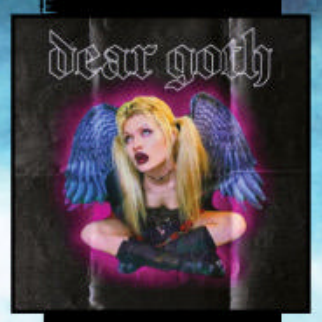
Cassyette: living her authentic life

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
An escapee of a convent finding solace in the darkness and deranged

FOR FANS OF:
Bring Me The Horizon, ZAND, Evanescence

LISTEN TO:
Dear Goth



NEW NOISE

VRSTY

That Killswitch Engage/The Weeknd-inspired r'n'b-metal mash-up you ordered has arrived

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

FOR SOME IN metal, pop will always be a dirty word. Not so for Joey Varela, the vocalist and multi-instrumentalist behind VRSTY, a solo project that juxtaposes chunky, arena-rock riffs with slinky r'n'b, and vivid, ultra-polished pop – think Bring Me The Horizon meets Asking Alexandria… via the Weeknd.

"I have always been interested in the pop world," he enthuses over Zoom from his Brooklyn home. "I grew up listening to Michael Jackson and Frank Sinatra exclusively, and as I got older, I got into Usher, Britney Spears and Backstreet Boys, NSync. I love pop music, but I also love playing guitar and when I play guitar, I write heavy. So I was like, 'OK I'll write heavy stuff, but I'll stick my little pop tunes over it.'"

It makes sense that Joey's gateway into metal was Killswitch Engage's chorus-led riffery – their firey, metallic influence can be heard all over VRSTY's snarling debut single, *Risen*. But since then, his vision for the band (he is joined by bandmates during live performances), has expanded into a much bigger, slicker and melodic beast. In 2021 he covered Lil Nas X's *MONTERO*, while his debut album, *Welcome Home* – which also pulls from smooth r'n'b on *We, Always* and country on *Soul* – is proof that metal and pop are more natural bedfellows than many might think.

"I was in bands before this that didn't work out because I wasn't allowed to do what I wanted," he explains. "In pop and rap music, it feels like everyone just wants to work with everyone else, but in metal, it's very separate. I don't care about genre. I just want to write good music and have fun performing it. You can literally do whatever you want, good music is good music and that's it. That's all it should be."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
A mutant R'n'B/metal sensation waiting to happen

FOR FANS OF:
Bring Me The Horizon, Issues, The Weeknd

LISTEN TO:
Closer

***WELCOME HOME* IS OUT NOW VIA SPINEFARM**

SARGAS

The Iranian metal band finding purpose in futility

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

THEY MAY SHARE their name with a star in the constellation of Scorpius, but there is little light to be found in the nihilistic worldview of Sargas, the Tehran-based band fusing elements of black, death and doom metal together to commemorate the pure futility of human existence. But then, when you form a band in a country that's arrested metal musicians for their art, perhaps a keen sense of fatalism is to be expected. "It's as if there's a shadow that's always behind us," explains vocalist Saleh Rezaei. "If you're a metal musician in Iran, you should prepare yourself to be condemned."

Despite the inherent risks, Sargas nonetheless stuck things out in Tehran to record their debut album *Labyrinth Of Evolution* in 2020, even setting up distribution for the record via Iranian metal label Tough Sounds. "We aim to raise the bar for the Iranian metal scene," explains founder and guitarist Salar Alizadeh. "Tough Sounds are Sargas's biggest motivation and we can't say how much we appreciate working with them."

Sargas spent much of 2021 refining *Labyrinth Of Evolution* to ensure their bleak vision is realised to its full potential, even going so far as to create an overarching concept involving a resurrected Cleopatra deciding to conquer "the apocalyptic modern world". If that all sounds a bit too highbrow, rest assured that the music still slays.

"Our music resembles our way of thinking," Salar says. "Sargas is a reflection of the darkest words people have in their minds and very rarely speak out loud."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Raging blasts of black metal being swallowed by an ocean of fatalistic doom

FOR FANS OF:
My Dying Bride, Baest, Conjurer

LISTEN TO:
Home

***LABYRINTH* OF EVOLUTION IS DUE TO BE RELEASED IN 2022 VIA TOUGH SOUNDS**

PRESS

TUSKAR

Doom-sludge duo find light and hope amid the crushing filth of life

WORDS: ALEX DELLER • PICTURE: LAWRENCE WHEELER

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Huge, expansive heavy metal that takes in sludge, post-metal and noise-rock while carving its own unique path

FOR FANS OF:
Mastodon, Big Business, Bala

LISTEN TO:
Shame

TUSKAR HAVE BEEN making serious waves with their sludge-fuelled post-metal, but with debut album *Matriarch* the Milton Keynes duo have created something truly special. While the results are staggering, the journey was far from easy, as vocalist/drummer Tyler Hodges reveals.

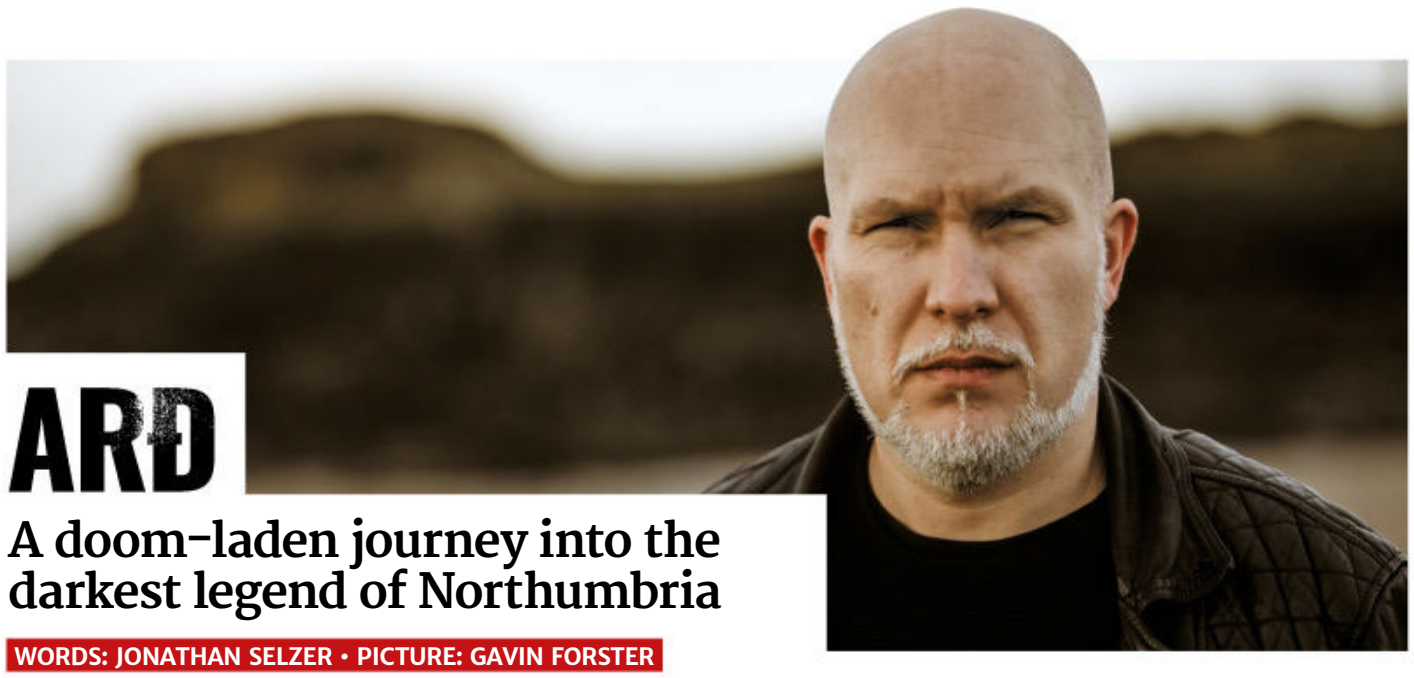
"I had a really bad spell with addiction and found myself in a hellish place," he says. "Tom [Dimmock, guitar], my partner and our good friend Joe really helped me claw my way out. After getting out of this pit, my life seemed to continually get worse. I found out my sister suffered through years of abuse in silence. My mum got cancer. It was like an episode of *EastEnders* – you couldn't fucking write it."

Matriarch, is, in large part, a way of Tyler making sense of a bleak situation, hailing the survivors in his life and providing solace for others. This latter sense of community is important to the pair – particularly in a live setting.

"It's not just about bashing out songs one after another," says Tom. "It's about connecting with other people in the room. We really bare ourselves on stage, so if you're watching you're definitely watching."

While *Matriarch* is undeniably crushing, however, there are also intentional glimmers of light. "Life isn't always bad," concludes Tyler. "There are good parts even though the bad often outweighs the good, and I hope we've conveyed this. We aren't just pure riffs and filth."

***MATRIARCH* IS RELEASED ON FEBRUARY 25 VIA CHURCH ROAD**



ARÐ

A doom-laden journey into the darkest legend of Northumbria

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: GAVIN FORSTER

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Haunting funeral doom with an ecclesiastical bent

FOR FANS OF:
My Dying Bride, Batushka, Mournful Congregation

LISTEN TO:
Raise Then The Incorruptible Body

THE BRAINCHILD OF Winterfylleth keyboardist Mark Deeks, Arð is both an extension of that band's deep dive into British history and landscapes and a sonic diversion. His debut album, *Take Up My Bones*, is an evocation of the former, lore-steeped Anglian kingdom of Northumbria, and the tale of St. Cuthbert, who commanded his fellow monks to carry his remains around the country after his death. Black metal clearly wasn't the most appropriate medium.

"Here's a tale of monks trudging around the countryside from place to place for a couple of hundred years carrying a coffin," says Deeks. "I mean how doom can you get?"

Sumptuously solemn, and carrying a liturgical, chant-infused atmosphere, *Take Up My Bones* may have Christian overtones, but fundamentally for Mark, it's a questioning of the power of belief.

"Obviously, Christians will see this as a tale of extreme devotion, but I wanted to reframe the story. What if Cuthbert's instruction to his followers wasn't a blessing given to the most staunchly faithful, but a curse to wander potentially dangerous lands for nothing more than to protect a dead hermit's bones? I've never been convinced by the case of any kind of divinity, but that kind of spiritual commitment can be quite stirring to observe."

***TAKE MY BONES* IS RELEASED ON FEBRUARY 18 VIA PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS**

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to

TURNSTILLE

"THE NEW TURNSTILE record has been on non-stop repeat for me. What's cool is I could picture that band on tour with Rage Against The Machine. Out with a Vampire Weekend. I could see them with Slipknot. They are out with $uicideboy$ right now. That band could tour with anything, and it will work."

MATT HEAFY, TRIVIUM

TURNSTILLE: PRESS/JIMMY FONTAINE. TRIVIUM: PRESS/MIKE DUNN.

HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

SLASH

FEATURING MYLES KENNEDY AND THE CONSPIRATORS

4 - DELUXE VINYL BOX SET

GIBSON

£129.99

LAST YEAR, SLASH, Myles Kennedy and the Conspirators flew to Nashville and recorded their new album playing live together, vocals and solos included. The result is 4 – 10 powerhouse tracks that recall the raw, amplified majesty of late-70s arena rock. The Deluxe Vinyl Box Set delivers a trove of riches befitting the lavish excess of that era. Along with the titular 140g black vinyl disc comes a limited edition '4' Slash Les Paul mini-guitar, a cassette tape featuring an exclusive 4-song live rehearsal from May, 2021, a CD in a softpack case, a 36-page photobook including a band interview and handwritten lyrics, a signed lithograph (limited to the first 500 copies) and myriad other tasty goodies. The inaugural release from Gibson Records, it's a decadent feast of collectibles that suitably honours the label, the music and the virtuosic, top-hatted legend himself.

tinyurl.com/slash-boxset

PIKACHU SKULL

£32

Gotta catch 'em all, kill 'em all, skin 'em all. Quite frankly, Pikachu's never looked better. Terrify all those pissbabies playing *Pokémon GO* with this handmade, 3D-printed, resin trophy of Ash Ketchum's furry mate.

tinyurl.com/pica-skull

VENOM PRISON BABY GROW

£12

Venom Prison's stunning new record, *Erebos*, sees the band grow up. Now your tyke can, er, grow up just like the band in this organic cotton sleepsuit. Look, just buy it for your dog if you want it that badly.

tinyurl.com/baby-venom

ZEAL & ARDOR HOODIE

£38

Zeal & Ardor are as intent on twisting metal out of shape as rearranging your vertebrae. Pledge your allegiance to the genre's future with one of these Fairtrade hoodies, which features artwork from their third LP.

tinyurl.com/zeal-hoodie

GHOST RE-ANIMATOR T-SHIRT

£15.99

Ghost are fast-overtaking Iron Maiden in the merch stakes, and this latest item reveals one method of resurrecting Papas while paying homage to Stuart Gordon's unhinged, HP Lovecraft-inspired 80s flick *Re-Animator.*

tinyurl.com/ghost-gruber

ROLO TOMASSI CUSHION

£28

Rammstein duvet. Deafheaven blanket. Now, we've got the Rolo Tomassi… oh, OK, it's actually quite tasteful. This cotton, handmade cushion cover is a classy, comfy reminder that there's more to Sheffield than Sean Bean.

tinyurl.com/rolo-cushion

ALIEN TANKS

£24.49

Spice up the bedside table with the friendly Xenomorph family. These intricately detailed beauties are enough to ensure you're single forever. Which is fine – extraterrestrial Giger-ian beasties make intimate pillow-talk.

tinyurl.com/alien-tanks

PIRATE PENDANT

£22

Vikings get all the cool merch and hammers and drinking-horns and shit. Pirates have some pretty metal imagery too, so flaunt it with this stainless steel, well 'aaaarrgghhhd skull and crossbones pendant.

tinyurl.com/pirate-pendant

JUDAS PRIEST GRAPHIC NOVEL

£18.69-£149.50

This sci-fi extravaganza draws on *Screaming For Vengeance* for inspiration, and the deluxe edition includes three art prints and a vinyl version of the album. Pony up more and you can get one that comes with a Hellion. Squawk!

tinyurl.com/graphic-priest

KILLSTAR BAPHY MUG

£9.99

What better vessel from which to sup thy foul black ichor than this cute little Baphomet coffee mug? Just be careful to not get a horn in your eye when you throw back those last bitter dregs…

tinyurl.com/killstar-mug

RAMMSTEIN BOOTS

£138.99

If you're a Rammstein fan you likely enjoy crushing things – riffs, beats, taboos, petulant idiocies, etc. These chunky, chain-encircled, logo-emblazoned clodhoppers are perfect for all your stomping needs.

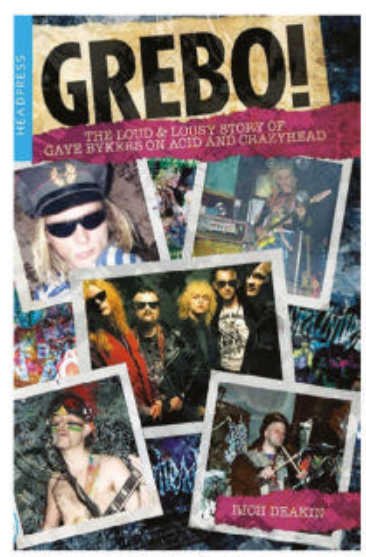
tinyurl.com/das-boot

BLOODYWOOD T-SHIRT

£21

Indian rap/metal behemoths Bloodywood hope to be a force for good, as well as a musical force to be reckoned with. Celebrate the release of their new album, *Rakshak*, and help them fight the good fight!

tinyurl.com/bloody-shirt



GREBO BOOK

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YOU CAN'T KILL KORN

Death, disease, paranoia and an absent Fieldy… and that's all just in the past few years. Almost three decades in, Korn remain as turbulent as ever. But has kickass new album *Requiem* helped them finally turn a corner?

WORDS: PAUL BRANNIGAN • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN

"Around the time of my father's death, I had severely slipped into bad drug use and alcoholism. I had lost both my parents now, and I didn't want to deal with it, didn't want to face it. I had a beautiful house by the beach, and I basically barricaded myself in, with all the windows blacked out, and turned music up really loud in every room. It was a very quiet neighbourhood until I moved in, so my neighbours must have been like, 'This motherfucker, we can't take this anymore…'

"So, one day this policeman knocked on my door, at like 6am, as the sun was rising. He asked if I had any guns in the house, and I responded, 'If I do have any guns, you will be the first to know,' and slammed the door in his face. And about 15 minutes later, I had a SWAT team outside my house…

"They got me out and arrested me, and they knew I was not OK: they could obviously see, like, 'OK, not only is he high, and drunk, but he's mentally unstable.' I woke up handcuffed to a hospital bed in a psychiatric ward, on hold for 72 hours. And that was the moment where I was like, 'I can't go on like this…'"

It's 11pm in Los Angeles, in the middle of the second week of January, and James 'Munky' Shaffer is in his stylish downtown studio/man cave, all exposed red brickwork and gleaming chrome pipes, a safe, tranquil space to which Korn's 51-year-old guitarist gravitates whenever what he describes as the "chaos" of family life with three young children threatens to become overwhelming. As he shares the anecdote above, one is reminded that his use of the word "chaos" here is relative, obviously.

"In the 90s, our attitude was, 'Fuck tomorrow, we're living today!'" the guitarist admits, laughing warmly as he settles in for a 30-minute Zoom call. "Sometimes I can't believe… wait, let me knock on this chair, because it's wood… sometimes I can't believe we're alive. If my neighbours hadn't called the cops on me that day, or maybe if I'd been living out on my own in acres of land instead of by the beach, I'd probably be dead."

"We were definitely not smart back then," agrees Brian 'Head' Welch, Munky's friend since "eighth or ninth grade… basically forever", and the co-creator of a game-changing, signature guitar sound that redefined heavy music in the mid-to-late 1990s. "We thought the Mötley Crüe story was a blueprint for life, and we followed it religiously. When you're young and dumb, you can live like that for a time, but sooner or later it will ruin your life. And it did, it surely did.

"But we all got a second chance," Head says quietly. "And sometimes I think, why were we the lucky ones? Why did we survive? Because if you think about Slipknot, and Avenged Sevenfold, and Deftones… so many bands have lost someone. And I'm just grateful, so very grateful, to see my friends healthy and happy now, still doing what we love. It's amazing."

Head too is in Los Angeles tonight, though not by choice. Korn's senior guitarist, just 13 days older than his lifelong friend, tested positive for Covid-19 over the holiday season and is currently self-isolating in a hotel room, 2,000 miles from his family home in Nashville, Tennessee, which he hasn't seen since December 20 last year. He rates his peak Covid discomfort level at "maybe six out of 10", and is still aching all over, but credits aspirin and the fact that he's vaccinated for safeguarding him from the most debilitating effects of the virus.

Ironically, were it not for the pandemic, it's unlikely that Korn's guitar team would be talking to *Hammer* today, sharing their thoughts on the Bakersfield band's 14th studio

Jonathan Davis:
in a good place

“I’M FUCKING HAPPY AS FUCK!”

JONATHAN DAVIS

album. Recorded in lockdown in their own hometown studio with producer Chris Collier, *Requiem* is the stirring sound of a band reborn, revitalised and renewed, a bold, fearless, conscious stride away from the pain and darkness of 2019's *The Nothing* into light, into life. Sitting in front of their laptop cameras in their respective dimly lit rooms, Munky and Head's faces radiate joy and gratitude as they speak of the album's creation, and the benefits it has already brought to their lives, and those of their bandmates. If a requiem is defined as a mass or musical composition for the dead, then Korn's latest album can be viewed as both a remembrance of past struggles and an exaltation celebrating joy and hope for what lies ahead. As their band creeps towards its 30th anniversary, it's a manifesto urging the embrace of possibilities, where before Korn often seemed to wish for oblivion and the void.

"*The Nothing* was a very, very heavy record," says Head, "coloured by death and grief and pain. But you can't stay in the darkness forever, you have to move forward, and grow, and live and love again. We've suffered, and the world has suffered, but now we're stepping into the light."

Onstage with his band at the Save Mart Center in Fresno, California on March 1, 2020, Jonathan Davis had a sudden, vivid premonition.

"I had this fucking vision, like, this is the last show I'm going to be doing for a long fucking time. That shit just popped into my head, like, I was looking out at the crowd thinking, 'Man, I don't think I'm going to be doing this for a while, what the fuck?' And then we got home, and we were supposed to be going to Japan, and we got the call, like, 'You're not going on tour.' And that's when the shit started to get crazy."

Bathed in red light, his hair tied up in a man bun, and his chest tattoos peeking above a black v-neck t-shirt, Jonathan Davis is sitting in front of a wall of framed art and family photographs in his Los Angeles home. It's almost midnight on America's Pacific Coast, and Korn's frontman is smiling and animated, rocking back and forward in his chair, as he stares straight into his webcam through black-framed spectacles. When it's suggested to him that this is a late hour to be conducting an interview, he chuckles, and says, "I've always been drawn towards the night rather than the day."

Since he started using a CPAP machine to aid his nocturnal breathing, Jonathan says he's been sleeping for just five hours a night, and feels "amazing."

"I go to bed at five, six, seven in the morning, sleep for five hours, and then I'm up, writing music, playing games, whatever. It's easier to do things at night. I don't like being around people! Ha ha ha!"

That laugh speaks volumes about Jonathan Davis in 2022. In conversation today, both Head and Munky speak of their band's frontman living "a new chapter" in his life, and that's an assessment with which the 50-year-old vocalist concurs. "I'm fucking happy as fuck! I'm in a way better fucking place," he says. "I've finally found a place in my life where I can face my demons, and confront them, and work them out right then, and not let them fuck with me for a long period of time. I know some more shit is going to be thrown at me, I'm gonna get another fucking curveball, we all do in life, and it's gonna put me right back where I was, but I'm

James 'Munky' Shaffer really pushed to get in the studio

"I GOT ARRESTED BY A SWAT TEAM"

JAMES 'MUNKY' SHAFFER

THURSDAYS JUST GOT HEAVIER

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hoping that I'll be able to handle it. And I'm going to enjoy everything while I can."

Asked what's changed to bring about this new positive mental attitude in his life, Jonathan repeats the question thoughtfully before responding.

"I would say after everything that went down [and here the singer is referring to the death of both his mother, and his ex-wife Deven, the mother of his two youngest children] I met an amazing woman that's fucking taken care of me, and I started a relationship that's healthy, and I know my children [Pirate and Zeppelin] are safe. There was a lot of shit that I really don't want to talk about, a lot of bad shit going on in my life, and I was trying to keep it all together: the band, my kids, all the crazy shit. Now that that has gone and I know everyone's good I think I'm finally in a place where I'm not in a constant state of fucking flight or fight and I can think and I can create… And then right when this was happening – boom – the pandemic hit, and oh my God, I'm back to I'm freaking out that I'm going to fucking die."

"But" – and here Jonathan lifts a finger to his temple – "I think up here I'm a lot more healthy."

The global lockdown enforced in the spring of 2020 to seek to minimise the transmission of the potentially fatal Covid-19 impacted upon the members of Korn in wildly contrasting ways.

For Head, the lay-off presented an opportunity to move his family into a new property in Nashville he had purchased in December 2019: "I had friends that lost jobs [as a result of the pandemic] and they came over and built me a movie theatre room, and we painted upstairs, and downstairs, and made the house a home," he says proudly. "It was really relaxing."

"SOMETIMES I THINK, 'WHY DID WE SURVIVE?'"

BRIAN 'HEAD' WELCH

For Korn's drummer Ray Luzier, a resident in nearby Franklin, Tennessee since 2014, and a touring musician since 1997, the downtime offered a chance to devote himself to parenting, "a blessing" he says, drinking a cup of Korn Koffee as he dials in from his drum room. "I have two little kids and it was just awesome to take them to school every day, put them to bed every day, play basketball with them. That was a beautiful thing."

The drummer also took the opportunity to play on near neighbour/Mötley Crüe guitarist Mick Mars's solo album, and record with late Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham's grandson Jager, Mr. Big bassist Billy Sheehan, King's X frontman Doug Pinnick, and ex-Dokken guitarist George Lynch.

Over in California, however, Munky and Jonathan were coping rather less well with the psychological effects of the shutdown.

"I really didn't do well with it," Munky admits. "Mentally, I was not OK. I was struggling, in shock. It was like every little piece of my normal life was slowly being peeled away. There's a picture of me on my social media page, where I'm wearing goggles, and I'm all covered up and I look like a Stormtrooper, and I was just going out for milk!"

"I was freaking the fuck out," says Jonathan. "We locked down the house and I didn't even leave the house to get food: my sister would go out all masked up and get us food. I was scared shitless because I'm an asthmatic, and I was afraid it would get my lungs and all that shit. It was scary. I wanted to tour more, I wanted to show the world this amazing record I just did, a record of me grieving and healing and going through all that shit. So I was kind of pissed that Covid fucked it up."

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, it was Munky and JD who pressed for the band to regroup in Bakersfield to start making music again. They went into the studio in June 2020.

"I was one of those people that were like, 'I'm gonna take up a new hobby!'" Munky laughs. "I'm gonna start an online singing course, to make my backup vocals killer! I'm gonna play guitar every day! That stuff was fun, it occupied my mind for a while, but it didn't fulfil that need to be playing music with my friends. And when it came down to it, I was like, 'OK, what would really make me happy would be to sit in a room and just make some songs.' In fact, I didn't even fucking care if we wrote anything, I just wanted to be communicating musically with my friends instead of thinking about death, and this dark, ominous thing you can't see which is bringing so much misery."

"Music is healing, you know?" adds Head. "There was no pressure, and no timetable: we weren't even really planning on making a record, we were just going to pretty much write songs and demo. But the songs just kept getting better and better. And so we just went for it."

"We would work for 10 days each month, and you could feel the excitement," says Munky. "Jonathan was in the room with us, humming melody lines or lyric ideas into his phone, and it was so much fun. I almost felt guilty actually, like, we're having so much fucking fun in here, and there's so much darkness out there. But we needed this."

For a bridge between *The Nothing* and *Requiem*, one might look to *The Darkness Is Revealing*, track four on the band's 2019 album, where Jonathan sings, *'How does one start healing?'* The first single from the new album, *Start The Healing*, released back in November, finds him picking his way carefully through a lifetime of emotional damage on a quest for inner peace, his opening lyric *'Do you really wanna come with me?'* at once an invitation and a warning of trying times ahead.

"What a perfect song to unleash the new record," Head marvels today.

"Working together is like doing drugs for us now," Jonathan said as the single was released in November. "We're continuously chasing that first high."

Reminded of this today, the singer laughs, and says, "See, every now and then I'll do an interview and say something profound!"

"When things came crashing down with Deven dying, we were going to tour his [solo] *Black Labyrinth* record, and I was like, 'Man, you know, take some time out, take all the time you need,'" says Ray. "And he goes, 'No, I need to perform, or I'll lose my mind, I will lose my shit.' Music is the best therapy you can have, without taking a drug.

"And I'll never forget on this record, Jon comes into the studio one day, and he had such a smile on his face and he goes, 'I'm so happy right now. What am I going to sing about?' And I was like, 'Sing about happiness!' It was so great to see him in that space, you know? There's some really heavy songs on the record that are heavy emotionally, and he really impressed me with his performances. Obviously Munky and Head did great, but Jon's on another level here."

Amid this outpouring of love and respect and catharsis in the studio, there was an elephant in the room, however. Within a matter of weeks, it became apparent that Fieldy, Korn's founding bassist, was struggling, self-medicating to a point where it was becoming an issue for other bandmembers. An intervention was staged, and it was suggested that the bassist should step away from the process in order to address his problems. In June, the

Brian 'Head' Welch: counting his blessings

INSIDE REQUIEM

Korn's track-by-track guide to album no.14

FORGOTTEN
Head: "This was one of the first songs we wrote for the record. Jonathan's lyrics are amazing, and I love the simplicity of the opening riff."

LET THE DARK DO THE REST
Jonathan: "Being happy was so foreign to me that often I'd rather be in a dark place: darkness became home. Dark feelings aren't necessarily evil, it's just a different energy, and I feed off that."

START THE HEALING
Munky: "I was on a treadmill in the hotel near the studio listening to *Breathe* on The Prodigy's *The Fat Of The Land*, and I had this big burst of inspiration. I wanted to capture that energy and attitude, and I wrote the bridge when I went back to my room. It's about us looking back on our history and going through renewal."

LOST IN THE GRANDEUR
Head: "That opening guitar riff? We tried that before on three records, *The Paradigm Shift* (2013), *The Serenity Of Suffering* (2016) and *The Nothing* (2019), and we could never make it work. But we never gave up on it!"

DISCONNECT
Munky: "This has a kind of swing feel, like 3/4 time or 6/8, which is different for us. Bands that inspire me, like Tool or Deftones or Nine Inch Nails, they're always doing these odd time signatures, and I think it's something we're going to explore more."

HOPELESS AND BEATEN
Ray: "My friend [ex-Dokken guitarist] George Lynch calls our producer, Chris Collier, The Wizard, because he can play anything, he's a freak. Chris had this riff which was like a slow, druggie old Sabbath thing, and then we started messing around with the chords. Jon's vocals on the chorus blew me away."

PENANCE TO SORROW
Head: "That one had to grow on me a little bit. The original riff came from Chris Collier, and the verses are almost like 80s New Wave. We took it to a really cool place."

MY CONFESSION
Ray: "This started from a weird effect that Head got on his FX board and then Munky had the verse riff. Only Korn can get away with that kind of bizarre sound, it's part of what makes this band unique.

WORST IS ON ITS WAY
Jonathan: "Right now everything is going good, but always in the back of my head I'm just waiting for that next bad thing to happen. I thought it was an amazing way to end the record because it's all about me battling the darkness and coming out on top, but life is a never-ending loop and there's always more bullshit ahead!"

bassist issued a statement acknowledging that he had "personal issues that at times have caused me to fall back on some of my bad habits" and admitted that this had "caused some tension with the people around me".

"It's been suggested to me to take some time off to heal," he wrote. "I'm going to respect what was asked of me and take that time… I'm thankful for all of your support, patience and understanding as we all have something that we deal with. Jonathan, Munky, Ray, and Head, I love you and I don't want to bring any tension or bad vibes to the circle."

Today, to their credit, the band don't duck the topic when it is broached.

"For his wellbeing and mental health, he needs to go focus on him," says Head. "Everybody was like, 'You need a rest, you don't seem happy.'"

"I love Fieldy to death, he's my boy," says Jonathan. "That's the reason why we did what we did. He needs to find that love for music again, and find why he lost it, and what's ailing him so badly. I've been there, so I'm not talking shit, we've all had to go through it. This is his time to figure it out. And however long it takes, I hope he can figure it out. Because I don't want to watch one of my best friends, my brother, die. And I don't want the band to enable that."

Since the completion of *Requiem*, life has not been entirely problem-free for Korn. On the road this summer, Jonathan tested positive for Covid on August 14, leading to the cancellation of six shows: when he returned to the stage, he performed sitting on a throne, with an emergency oxygen supply by his side. "I just wanted to get through it because I saw how happy people were to see live music," he later admitted, "and I just didn't wanna let anyone down." When Munky and Ray later contracted the virus too, replacements were drafted in, and the band played on. This is the new Korn, resilient, determined, unbreakable.

Ask Jonathan Davis how he spends his time now that he's not carrying the weight of the entire world on his shoulders, and he laughs, and talks about his new "bad ass" airguns, with which he practises "sniper shit" in his backyard, sending tin targets spinning across the grounds. But music remains his true passion. Asked if he could imagine life without Korn now, the singer's reply is instant: "I can't," he says, shaking his head. "This is the outlet that keeps me sane. I'd be a weird, fucked-up fuck if it wasn't for Korn. It's been 27, 29, whatever, years and I've never got tired of this. I'm going to keep doing it until I can't do it no more.

"After all the shit that's happened down all the years, we're still here," he adds. "We were just five kids from Bakersfield in a little room, not knowing what the fuck we were doing, and we came up with music that hit so many people in the heart, and created a whole new sub-genre for metal, a whole new movement. When Korn are finished, that's what we'll be remembered for, and that's fucking incredible. And that magic is still there for us. And soon enough, we'll be back on stage together, and the audiences will be there, and we'll all come together and have a great big fucking party. We're ready."

***REQUIEM* IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 4 VIA LOMA VISTA. KORN PLAY DOWNLOAD IN JUNE**

Ray Luzier: loving the school run

"I TOLD JON TO SING ABOUT HAPPINESS!"

RAY LUZIER

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SILVER LINING MUSIC

nu AND IMPROVED

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

Heavy metal's most obnoxious movement is back. From its OG stars experiencing second winds to the young bands taking it forward, this is the story of nu metal's unlikely resurrection

GETTY

You can always pinpoint the moment a rumble underfoot becomes a movement. This year, it happened on Saturday July 31, at 6.30pm, at Chicago's Lollapalooza Festival.

"Let me make this clear," drawled Limp Bizkit frontman Fred Durst, addressing a huge crowd, dressed like an extra from *Starsky & Hutch* in 100% polyester, complete with red aviators, a grey mop and a handlebar moustache. "This is not Woodstock '99."

It wasn't. But as a vitriolic *Break Stuff* kicked off a pit of moshers that probably weren't even born when it was initially released, it might as well have been. The streamed set went viral with Fred's 'Dad Vibes' look breaking the internet, causing the band's song sales to double and brewing a feverish buzz around new album *Still Sucks*, their first since 2011's *Gold Cobra*, which dropped on Halloween. For the first time in forever, a hype had descended on Bizkit that was heavier than mere nostalgia. It was solid proof that nu metal was back.

Really, it was inevitable. Here at *Hammer* we've been banging on about the nu metal revival for the last five years, as we watched bands such as Loathe, Northlane, Cane Hill and Vein tap into its swaggering bounce and downtuned aggression. But it's only now it feels like we're properly living in a renaissance, one where the genre's past and present has coalesced into a new wave that is reconfiguring its legacy.

While stalwarts Korn, Papa Roach and Disturbed have continued to enjoy enduring success, in April 2021, veterans Mudvayne announced they were reforming after an 11-year hiatus and playing a slew of major US festivals. For better or worse, Y2K fashion has started making a comeback, with wallet chains, *Matrix*-style PVC trench coats and path-sweeping trousers appearing in mainstream stores. And most importantly, we can hear nu metal's influence running rampant among young bands and artists.

Spiritbox's big break came with nu metal-influenced rager *Holy Roller*, while Code Orange's recent face-kicker, *Out For Blood*, channels nu metal's lost gem, *Across The Nation* by the Union Underground, and sounds like a Wrestlemania theme song to boot. Meanwhile, from Tetrarch to Wargasm, Tallah to Employed To Serve, to Poppy and Nova Twins, a diverse range of artists across the metal spectrum are binning off the original wave's misogynistic, white-bro hubris for something that pushes the genre forward.

"It's cool to hear some of those elements creeping back into the music – it legitimises us even more," says Papa Roach vocalist Jacoby Shaddix, who, last year, teamed up with TikTok creator and rapper Jeris Johnson on a remix of nu metal classic *Last Resort*. To date, the collab has been viewed more than 7 million times on Youtube, introducing the track to a brand new audience. "I look back on nu metal fondly now, because back in the day I was like, 'Fuck nu metal, that shit is dead.' Now I'm like, 'Fuck yeah. I was one of the OGs!' We were creating something, a sound that was new and unique and that's fucking dope. I am so grateful to be part of that story."

"People who were kids when it was blowing up are starting to peak in their band careers," says Tetrarch's lead guitarist, Diamond Rowe. Last year the Atlantans released their second album, *Unstable*, which put a modern, metallic spin on the nu metal template and saw them emerge as the leaders of the Nu Wave Of Nu Metal. "Bands are finding again the value in melody, big choruses and dynamics in music, and when you look back at some of the biggest bands to do that, they came out of that nu metal era with your Disturbeds and your Linkin Parks. You can talk as much shit about them as you possibly want, but at the end of the day, you can't deny these bands were huge and they were huge for a reason."

Remixed Roach: Jacoby Shaddix and Jeris Johnson have introduced *Last Resort* to a new audience

That old guard has continued to be a huge live draw. "I do a lot of surveying with our festival fanbase," explains festival owner and booker Danny Wimmer, who last year booked Mudvayne to play Danny Wimmer Presents (DWP) festivals across the US, including a headline slot at Inkcarceration Music And Tattoo Festival in Ohio. "Mudvayne kept coming up, year after year, as a reunion that the fans wanted to see."

While the *Dig* creators don't inspire quite the same level of fanaticism over here in Europe, the announcement of their resurrection sparked a metal Twitter meltdown in the US, with Inkcarceration selling out three weeks after the headline announcement – no mean feat in the age of Covid.

"The research said to us they were ready in this market to be a headliner," Danny continues. "I knew there was so much momentum. This was the first bite of the apple to help position them so, when they came back in 2022 for their headline tour, they would be positioned right."

While, unsurprisingly, festival line-ups tend to be a numbers game, for Danny, the return of Limp Bizkit and Mudvayne signals something bigger than legacy bands shifting tickets by resting on past success. "This isn't a nostalgia play, it feels right," he continues, noting the relevance of nu metal within current pop culture discourse. "You don't see a lot of bands writing Poison songs today. But with nu metal, you can hear it and you can feel the tones of that genre in current bands."

Two decades on from its initial reign and given the amount of derision that's been thrown its way since, it's easy to forget just how big a deal nu metal actually was. Reaching across pop, rock, metal and hip hop, from 1997-2003 it seeped into every aspect of mainstream culture.

"As goofy as some of the styles were, it was something people could latch on to," says Diamond. "I know your

PAPA ROACH: PRESS/STEPHANIE MOSER

Tetrarch: leaders of the Nu Wave Of Nu Metal

Limp Bizkit: Dad Vibes FTW

"BACK IN THE DAY, I WAS LIKE, 'FUCK NU METAL!'"

JACOBY SHADDIX, PAPA ROACH

average metal fan would be like, 'UUURGH that's so lame that my rap friend likes this', but I think that's super-cool. And that's why those bands are still so huge and they're still gaining fans every day."

In 2000, Eminem's *The Real Slim Shady* name-dropped Fred Durst in the same breath as Christina Aguilera. Later that year, Bizkit's *Chocolate Starfish And The Hot Dog Flavored Water* sold more than a million copies in its first week of release, with a launch party at the bloomin' Playboy Mansion.

Now nu metal is bubbling up into the mainstream all over again, in the music of artists – many of whom are women – as diverse as rapper Bree Runway, pop superstar Rina Sawayama, and futuristic genre-mashers Grimes and Poppy, forcing nu metal into the ears of a brand-new generation of fans who are discovering it for the first time.

TETRARCH: PRESS/JEREMY SAFFER. LIMP BIZKIT: GETTY.

nu world ORDER

Ten modern-day nu metal bangers that prove the genre is in rude health again

TETRARCH
I'm Not Right
The lead single from last year's excellent *Unstable* album helped install Tetrarch as commanders-in-chief of the nu metal resurgence. Channelling the likes of Adema, Spineshank and *Untouchables*-era Korn, it was instant metal club dancefloor fodder.

SPIRITBOX
Hurt You
While Spiritbox's debut album, *Eternal Blue*, was a gorgeous amalgamation of a whole host of influences, second track *Hurt You* hangs around a riff taken straight out of the Head and Munky playbook, layering it with sumptuous electronics and a djenty underbelly.

TALLAH
No One Should Read This
Built off a carefully crafted horror concept and stacked with groove and swagger, 2020's *Matriphagy* was a smorgasbord of classic nu metal references. Mudvayne, Coal Chamber and Slipknot loom large on this rager.

BLIND CHANNEL
Dark Side
Måneskin may have stolen the headlines at last year's Eurovision, but nu metal Finns Blind Channel gave a pretty good account of themselves, too – so much so, that this anthemic call to arms has ended up amassing more than 45 million streams on Spotify.

DEATH BLOOMS
Life Is Pain
Despite the songtitle, 2021 was actually pretty good to Death Blooms – they released their debut album to solid reviews and became the first band to play at Castle Donington in two years when they got to open up Download Pilot in June. Not bad at all!

WARGASM
Spit
One of the UK's fastest-rising rock bands, Wargasm's mix of bouncy nu metal and snotty riot grrrl punk has seen them nab tour and festival slots all over the joint. Propulsive, danceable breakthrough single *Spit* remains their finest moment so far.

NOVA TWINS
Taxi
2020's *Who Are The Girls?* was one of that year's most raved-about debuts, and it's easy to see why given Nova Twins' irresistible blend of rock, metal, grime and dance. This bopper mixes funky percussion, sweeping electronics and, of course, big fat riffs.

RINA SAWAYAMA
STFU!
Proving that nu metal's resurrection has spread well beyond the rock scene, the London-based, genre-splicing alternative pop star utilised turn-of-the-century metal riffs to propel this standout single from her brilliant sophomore record, *Sawayama*.

CODE ORANGE
Out For Blood
Alright, so nu metal's influence on Code Orange thus far has been mostly fleeting, but there's a huge, turn-of-the-century vibe to this industrialised metal club crusher-in-waiting. Yes, it sounds a bit like Powerman 5000. And yes, that's just fine.

BLACK COAST
Ache
Nu on the scene (sorry) but making some significant strides in the underground, this British five-piece blend a perfect mixture of Korn, Linkin Park and Deftones and inject it with that extra dose of early-00s angst that was once a mainstream metal staple.

Blind Channel: bowled over by the Dark Side

Danny Wimmer: festival organiser and nu metal supporter

And it doesn't get much more mainstream than Eurovision. Last year rock crashed Europe's annual dairy-fest, with Italian retro-rockers Måneskin seizing the crown. Most surprising, though, were Finnish lifelong nu metal fans Blind Channel, whose raging, Linkin Park-indebted entry, *Dark Side*, ended up taking sixth place. "We were born and raised with nu metal. Seeing Linkin Park and Limp Bizkit on the television was the start of the musical experience for us," says vocalist and guitarist Joel Hokka.

"For the past couple of years, we've been a big thing on the Finnish rock scene," continues co-vocalist Niko Moilanen. "But there were times when everybody would say, 'You've got to stop that rapping thing, that ain't cool.' Even the big major labels in Finland said that. We said, 'Fuck no.' Nu metal is the coolest thing ever, we should just stick to our vision."

It's paid off. With more than 45 million streams, *Dark Side* was the third most streamed song of all 2021's Eurovision entries. And with their fame having rocketed internationally since the contest, and a deal with Century Media in the bag, Joel and Niko now speak with and exude the kind of unshakeable confidence that made the titans of nu metal such enduring superstars.

"We're not shy about it, we wanted to hit the fucking mainstream," continues Niko. "If that means being hated but being super-, super-successful then go on. Fucking hate us. We don't care. We're going to do exactly what we have always done."

"IF WE'RE HATED BUT SUCCESSFUL, THEN HATE US!"

NIKO MOILANEN, BLIND CHANNEL

With a new crop of artists flying the flag, the likes of Blind Channel, Wargasm and Tetrarch have found themselves as gateway bands for young fans to discover the juggernauts of the genre. "My youngest brother was born in 2005 and after *Dark Side* he's slowly realising his big brother is actually becoming a rock star," says Joel. "He asked me, 'What is that Linkin Park song you mentioned? My friends are listening to it all the time.'"

The impact is being felt at the top of the festival bills. "When a genre gets so mainstream like hip hop and dance, you need an outlet," says Danny Wimmer, who's noticed that nu metal bands such as Korn, Mudvayne and Slipknot, who all played at 2021's DWP festivals, are attracting a younger audience.

"Sometimes cool can eat itself," he adds, noting that society at large seems hungry for a taste of counterculture. "Here in the States, you're seeing more metal t-shirts in a mainstream outlet store than you're seeing in any genre. They're impacting the youth. They might not know their music, but they're going, 'There's something cool about that that's cooler than me wearing a Travis Scott t-shirt.'"

In the end (no pun intended) though, what's kept nu metal alive is the songs. Gargantuan anthems that continue to resonate and start pits decade after decade.

"There's multi-levels to *Last Resort* that makes it connect," says Jacoby Shaddix. "There's the surface level, where you can rock out to it in the gym, or you can be at a party and turn up to it. But then you dig in deeper and it's talking about some really traumatic shit. But the fucking riff, dude, though! That riff, every kid wants to play that on guitar. They love it, they won't stop and I'm not mad about it."

"When you hear *Rollin'* or *Got The Life* in any setting today, people go crazy," adds Danny. "It really is one of the last times we had a moment. A true moment that had a name attached to it. A lot of these nu metal acts you're talking about are just incredible live performers. They're really the last of the rock'n'roll, bigger-than-life spirits."

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON 2022 DWP EVENTS, SEE DANNYWIMMERPRESENTS.COM.
PAPA ROACH'S NEW ALBUM, *EGO TRIP*, IS OUT ON MARCH 3 VIA NEW NOIZE.
BLIND CHANNEL TOUR THE UK IN SEPTEMBER.
TETRARCH'S *UNSTABLE* IS OUT NOW VIA NAPALM

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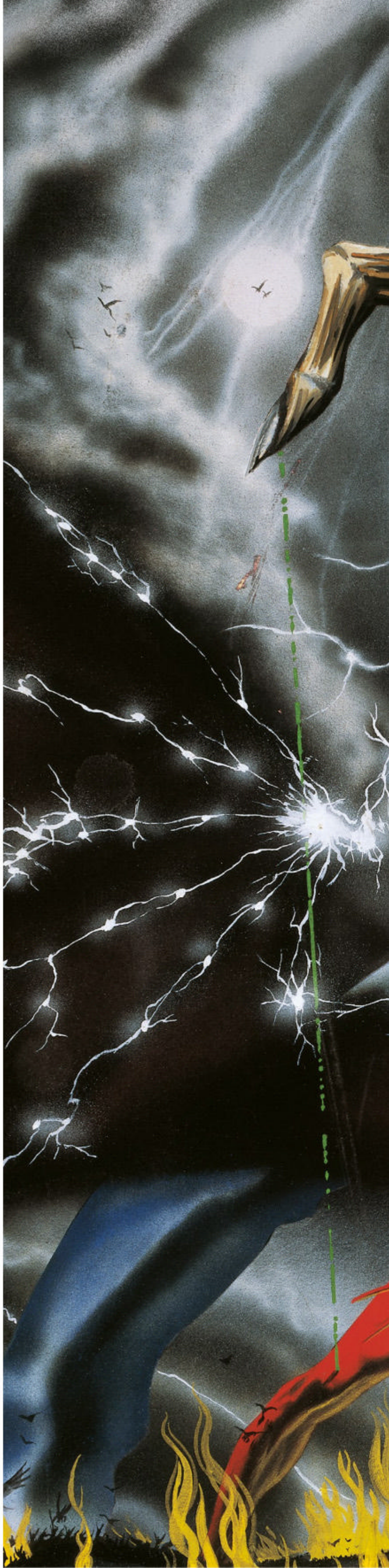
TWO MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

From Cradle Of Filth to Employed To Serve to, um, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, *The Number Of The Beast* has continued to influence generations across metal. Forty years on, it may yet remain Maiden's definitive masterpiece



IRON MAIDEN

2022 IRON MAIDEN LLP

It was no coincidence that the B-side of Iron Maiden's debut single (*Running Free*, released February 1980) was entitled *Burning Ambition*. In contrast to the majority of the bands that fuelled the nascent New Wave Of British Heavy Metal 40 years ago, Steve Harris's crew had the vision, focus, commitment and discipline of a band with nothing less than world domination on their minds. After years of tireless gigging, the Londoners' first two albums – *Iron Maiden* (1980) and *Killers* (1981) – had thrust them firmly into the spotlight - with unforgettable, iconic, Eddie-centric artwork providing another layer of intrigue.

Unfortunately, the best-laid plans almost always turn to shit, and by the time Maiden were reaching the end of their US tour in support of *Killers*, it had become abundantly apparent that talismanic frontman Paul Di'Anno was rather more interested in getting wasted on cocaine and booze than he was in delivering the high-quality performances that the band had made their trademark. Immediately after the tour, Paul was sacked, and one of the hottest rock bands on the planet suddenly found themselves – with the recording of that all-important third album looming - in urgent need of a worthy replacement. As you may be aware, they found one.

After a meeting with Maiden manager Rod Smallwood backstage at the Reading Festival in August 1981, soon to be ex-Samson vocalist Bruce Dickinson was summoned for an audition a few weeks later and, not surprisingly given the fucking pipes on the man, was immediately hired. Now armed with a new secret weapon and still surfing on waves of hard-earned momentum, Iron Maiden hit Battery Studio in London with producer Martin Birch to record the album that would change everything: *The Number Of The Beast*.

"IT WAS BRUCE'S FIRST ALBUM… WHAT A WAY TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF!"

DANI FILTH, CRADLE OF FILTH

From its epoch-shattering cover art to its near-universally cherished musical contents, Iron Maiden's third album is simply one of *the* definitive heavy metal records from the genre's formative years. Prior to its release back in February 1982, Maiden released a single, *Run To The Hills*, which introduced Bruce Dickinson's incredible voice to the world. Accompanied by a ludicrous but great, Wild West-themed video, the single quite rightly rocketed into the UK Top 10. An instant anthem, *Run To The Hills* confirmed that Iron Maiden had done more than negotiate a major line-up change: they were a band reborn, and with more swagger and confidence than ever. A month later, *The Number Of The Beast* was released in its full glory and shot immediately to #1 in the UK album chart. Meanwhile, over in Los Angeles, a young Brian Slagel (a lifelong Iron Maiden fanatic and the owner of Metal Blade Records) was officially the happiest man on the planet.

"For me, Maiden were *already* my favourite band, so when they changed singers it was interesting, like 'Ooh, what is this gonna be like?'" Brian recalls to *Hammer*. "But knowing Samson already, I thought Bruce would do really well, and *then* I got the record. From the first listen I was just blown away. *The Number Of The Beast*, to me, still to this day, is the perfect heavy metal album. *Everything* is perfect. The sound is perfect, the songs are perfect, the lyrics are perfect. It's the ultimate heavy metal album and it checks off all the boxes. I probably listened to it incessantly, over and over and over again, for at least a couple of weeks. I became completely obsessed with it."

While conquering the UK was already on the cards, *The Number Of The Beast* was the record that ensured that Iron Maiden would be an unstoppable force everywhere else too, and particularly in the US. Thanks in part to the ferocious brilliance of songs like *Children Of The Damned* and *22 Acacia Avenue*, but also to the self-evident fact that Bruce Dickinson was a force to be reckoned with, *The Number Of The Beast* exuded exactly the kind of ambition that the fledgling heavy metal scene needed to push things forward. Having already toured extensively in America, Maiden had paved the way for bigger and better things, but *The Number Of The Beast* sped the process up considerably.

"When the success came, it came really fast," says Brian Slagel. "It was interesting. I went to see them in 1981 when they opened for Judas Priest. I flew to Houston to see them, the first time I saw them, and nobody really knew who they were. There was definitely an underground buzz and the metal scene in the US was starting to happen. Metallica were doing the underground circuit by that point. But when *The Number Of The Beast* came out, it did well at the start and then I remember it accelerated *so* fast. By the time they came back and did the tour for that album, they were already headlining some arenas."

It's hard to overstate the impact *The Number Of The Beast* has had on generations of metal fans and musicians. Defining their sound across eight songs and 40 minutes of peerless bombast, Iron Maiden's third album arrived at the perfect time: when heavy metal was gaining traction as a genre and needed new standard bearers to spread the gospel around the world. In aesthetic terms, *The Number Of The Beast* also looked cooler, gnarlier and more exciting than anything else on record shop shelves back in 1982. If seeing the video for *Run To The Hills* on *Top Of The Pops* had failed to convince you, Derek Riggs' magnificent artwork was sure to seal the deal. Hysterical religious folk in America did not react quite so well, decrying Iron Maiden as Satanists and even burning piles of LPs in protest at the album's supposed occult content. But those people were silly and probably did Maiden a favour by generating some extra publicity. So well done.

Forty years on, the influence of *The Number Of The Beast* can be heard in a vast array of contemporary heaviness, and it might be quicker to list notable metal musicians who *don't* cite the record as an inspiration. A band with a subtle but unmistakable debt to Iron Maiden, both musically and visually, Cradle Of Filth confirmed their endorsement of the band with a cover of *Hallowed Be Thy Name* back in 1998. As Dani Filth explains, *The Number Of The Beast* was an essential part of any 80s metal kid's collection.

"Back in the day, I'd go to Woolworths and they'd have a load of cheap albums, and for some reason they had *Killers*, *The Number Of The Beast* and *Piece Of Mind*, all at £3.49, so my dad got me one at a time!" Dani laughs. "I think *The Number Of The Beast* was one of the first I got. It was a massive game-changer. In some ways it was quite contentious. They moved away from their origins in a way, because the first two records had that punky edge, mainly thanks to Paul Di'Anno. But it was Bruce's first album, and what a way to introduce yourself… [passable Bruce falsetto] *'Invaaaaders!'* Ha ha ha! Fucking hell. I wonder what people thought when they heard that first song. Bruce's wail was something else. And then there's *Hallowed Be Thy Name*, which is *obviously* the best song on the record."

GETTY

Iron Maiden in 1982 (clockwise from bottom left): Steve Harris, Clive Burr, Adrian Smith, Bruce Dickinson, Dave Murray

Steve, Dave and Adrian making the magic happen

Frequently cited as one of the greatest heavy metal songs ever written, *The Number Of The Beast*'s epic closing track is an undeniable cornerstone of heavy metal's internal architecture. Alongside Cradle Of Filth's venomous rendition, everyone from heavyweights Machine Head and Dream Theater to doom legends Solitude Aeturnus and US metalcore berks Escape The Fate have covered the song.

"It's just such a blinder to play," grins Dani. "There's so much space for the vocalist. It's really melodic. It's got a really great storyline, about a condemned man facing the gallows. It really builds up. It's tragic, too – the perfect ending to a record. They couldn't have ended the album with anything else."

"*Hallowed Be Thy Name* is the greatest song ever written, according to me!" declares Brian Slagel. "Everything about it is perfect. The lyrical content is really cool – you really feel like you're that guy, waiting to be hanged. You get his feelings, his emotions. The singing is great. The leads are incredible. Adrian [Smith] and Dave [Murray] are really the two most underrated guitarists ever. They don't get the credit they deserve at all. But yeah, it's literally the perfect heavy metal song. There's not one thing I would change. I still get goosebumps every time I listen to it."

After the release of *The Number Of The Beast*, Iron Maiden spent the rest of the 80s being generally all-conquering and unstoppable. Somehow, they even managed to negotiate the 90s, even as old-school metal was in a state of commercial fragility. The influence of *The Number Of The Beast* and the classic Maiden sound it cast in stone would not be denied, and the 21st century saw a huge resurgence in popularity for both the band themselves *and* the heavy metal template they threw down in 1982. From contemporary classicists like Arch Enemy, Trivium and Amon Amarth to the entire metalcore scene, Maiden's musical fingerprints are plastered all over today's heavy music world.

"Oh, big time, their influence is absolutely huge," says Employed To Serve's Sammy Urwin. "Maiden are a funny one. They're the one that seems to stick out for people, especially in the hardcore scene. Everyone is into Sabbath and Priest, but Maiden can be the Marmite one of the three. But they've influenced so much metalcore. Everyone from Prayer For Cleansing, Unearth and Darkest Hour – the influence of records like *The Number Of The Beast* on bands like that is undeniable. I went even further down the Maiden rabbit hole and became a little bit obsessed, I think."

"THE INFLUENCE OF *THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST* ON METALCORE IS UNDENIABLE"

SAMMY URWIN, EMPLOYED TO SERVE

Not just influential on a musical level, *The Number Of The Beast* is as much a part of heavy music *culture* as it is a straightforward, mandatory soundtrack for diehard metalheads. In fact, the album has transcended its heavy metal origins and passed into the broader mainstream consciousness, as Sammy explains:

DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Bruce Dickinson: human air raid siren and national treasure

"Being from that metalcore generation, the *Tony Hawk* games were so influential on my musical taste, as ridiculous as it sounds. *The Number Of The Beast* was on *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4* and I'd be playing that all the time, so that song is just ingrained into my head. I've got a special relationship with it. When you're younger, you get things coming at you like Slipknot and Limp Bizkit, and it's all flashy and exciting, but as your taste grows and you get into more progressive stuff, there's so much more to unlock with records like *The Number Of The Beast*. Maiden are the gift that keeps on giving."

Aside from making some of us feel very fucking old, the 40th anniversary of *The Number Of The Beast* is clearly one worth celebrating. The moment when one of the greatest bands of all time truly hit their stride and morphed into the unassailable heroes we know today, it was the perfect album at the perfect time, by the perfect heavy metal band.

"For me it came along at a time when I was really heavily getting into the whole metal thing," Brian Slagel concludes. "I was starting my record company and it was a pivotal point in my life, and which determined what I would do for the rest of it! Maiden motivated me to do whatever I could to make other people hear this amazing music. If *The Number Of The Beast* could touch me so much, everybody else needed to hear it. It was the greatest thing I've ever heard. It was a life-changing experience." H

IRON MAIDEN'S LATEST ALBUM, *SENJUTSU*, IS OUT NOW VIA PARLOPHONE. MAIDEN HEADLINE DOWNLOAD IN JUNE

DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

BEAST MODE

A guide to every track on *The Number Of The Beast*... and the notable bands who have covered them!

INVADERS
Invaders is an explosive opener, delivered at breakneck pace and with the band's new singer front, centre and wailing like an actual air raid siren. Any lingering doubts about the new frontman? No, we thought not.
Covered by: Candiria

CHILDREN OF THE DAMNED
An all-time Maiden classic. Rich in atmosphere and grandeur, *Children Of The Damned* begins as a haunting, cautionary tale and ends with a skull-rattling final sprint and earth-shattering crescendo. Still breathtaking.
Covered by: Therion

THE PRISONER
Based on the cult 60s TV show of the same name, *The Prisoner* begins with actor Patrick McGoohan's ageless roar of defiance ("I am not a number, I am a free man!") and then delivers the epic and thunderous heavy metal goods.
Covered by: Fozzy

22 ACACIA AVENUE
The sequel to the earlier *Charlotte The Harlot*, this paean to the backstreet sex trade is one of Maiden's greatest and most thunderous deep cuts. Thanks to a decent helping of self-aware pathos, the lyrics haven't aged as badly as you might think, either.
Covered by: Dark Tranquillity

THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST
That spooky intro, that subtly wonky opening riff, *that* chorus: *The Number Of The Beast* is an immaculate mini-masterpiece. Inspired by a nightmare Steve Harris had after watching *Damien: Omen II*, it's one of the heaviest hit singles ever.
Covered by: Kreator

RUN TO THE HILLS
Maiden have always been great storytellers, and *Run To The Hills* was one of their first great stories. Shrewdly straddling the fence in the whole cowboys versus 'Indians' debate, this Top 10 smash is one of metal's crown jewels.
Covered by: Hellsongs

GANGLAND
Despite being widely accepted as the only real weak point on *The Number Of The Beast*, *Gangland* still kicks arse while also providing a dazzling showcase for the late, great Clive Burr's extraordinary drumming. Also, songs about gangsters are cool.
Covered by: Dream Theater

HALLOWED BE THY NAME
The mother of all album closers, *Hallowed Be Thy Name* was instantly embraced as a classic and remained in Maiden's live shows for several decades. If you were alone in your cell, awaiting your execution, what *else* would you want to listen to?
Covered by: Cradle Of Filth, Machine Head

THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

JERRY CANTRELL

Not only is he the co-founder and chief songwriter of Alice In Fucking Chains, he's acted in Oscar-winning movies, collaborated with Elton John and knocked Mariah Carey off the No.1 spot

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: JONATHAN WEINER

JERRY CANTRELL

18+

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It's not very grunge to talk about yourself and your achievements; the Seattle scene that birthed so many icons is characterised by its down-to-earth, unshowy nature. As such, Jerry Cantrell, Alice In Chains' guitarist/vocalist, is an affable but humble interviewee. "I just go where the music takes me and with what feels right," he tells us. "And right now, it's taken me to a new solo album, where I got the chance to play with my friends and a bunch of people that I've never played with before."

Featuring contributions from Guns N' Roses' Duff McKagan and ex-Dillinger Escape Plan frontman Greg Puciato, third solo album *Brighten* is another milestone in an impressive career that began in 1987, when Jerry co-founded Alice In Chains. Thanks to the hype around grunge and the success of anthemic single *Man In The Box*, the band's rise was meteoric, and they cemented their legacy with 1992 album *Dirt*. Tragically, they slowly self-destructed, with frontman Layne Staley passing away from a heroin overdose in 2002. By this point, Jerry had embarked on his solo career, and no one expected to see Alice In Chains again. But in 2006, they reformed with new vocalist William DuVall, leading to an unexpected yet inspiring second act.

Meanwhile, Jerry has collaborated with artists from Elton John to Metallica, and has flirted with the film world, appearing in *Deadwood: The Movie* and working with director Cameron Crowe on *Singles* and *Jerry Maguire*. One thing's for sure: he's come a long way from his "little town" of Seattle.

Jerry Cantrell: a gem from the Emerald City

When did you get introduced to music?
"We used to play a lot of country music in our house, and so that was when I was first exposed to that. I could give you a list of about 50 artists, they're all the old classics, and that was a big thing for me. My mother also played organ, so there was that, plus [performance/dance TV show] *American Bandstand* and AM radio, Cat Stevens, the Bee Gees – there was a whole mix of stuff going on in my house."

Who were the artists that inspired you as a child?
"Elton John and Fleetwood Mac were big awakenings for me, as far as songwriting and what that meant and getting the magic of what that was. This was when I discovered the guitar as well, so there was AC/DC, Maiden, Kiss and Priest… it was a huge time to be a music fan."

The first album you ever owned was 1974's *Elton John's Greatest Hits*, and then he ended up on your comeback album, *Black Gives Way To Blue*, in 2009. That's quite an amazing story…
"Yeah, that's true. My dad gave me that album. It's one of those surreal, full-circle moments where this guy that was so influential to you ends up playing your song on his piano with you. He's a fantastic man, a good hang and a fan of music – he's a lifer. It's all I ever wanted to be, to be someone who wrote music that people wanted to listen to, and he's definitely that guy. An amazing talent and a beautiful human being."

Do you remember the first time you held a guitar in your hands?
"My mother got me my first guitar. She was dating a guy at the time and he came over to jam with her. They were playing some tunes – she was on the organ and he was on the guitar – and I think I picked up a tennis racket and was miming air guitar with them. He was like, 'Does he play guitar?' and she said, 'No', and he got me over and showed me a few chords and I picked it up straight away. He said to

her, 'Maybe you should get him one, he looks like he's into it!' She got me a little Spanish nylon string guitar, but it wasn't until I got an electric guitar until it really kicked in. When I could hit that distortion and crank it up I really felt the power."

You were childhood friends with Pantera's Abbott brothers, Vinnie and Dime, which is crazy to think knowing what you all went on to achieve, isn't it?
"Yeah, we had pretty similar career arcs. I went to college, really just to give me more time to fuck about and play guitar, and a few buddies of mine started a band. We never really played any shows, but the drummer decided he wanted to quit college and go to Texas for a year. I thought that sounded pretty good, so I quit halfway through my first semester and moved to Texas.

"We used to hang out in Houston and Dallas. There was a club called Cardi's [in Houston] and lots of bands played there, and one night Pantera came through and I met those guys; I wanted to because they were so great. I was hanging with Vinnie, Rex and Dime, this was before Phil [Anselmo] joined the band, and I'm like half redneck and half Yankee – I was born in Washington but my Dad is from Oklahoma – which meant I got on with those guys really well. We had the same interests and the same dreams; it's pretty crazy to see how our lives went."

What was Seattle, and the Seattle scene, really like during the grunge boom period of the early 90s?
"At first it was just a lot of really great bands; I think anyone from any scene would tell you the same story. It was kind of unusual because there was a group of us that all took off together, but it was just our little town. The cool thing was that we would all hang out together. It's a big small town, there weren't a whole lot of places to play – skating rinks, parties, garages – there weren't many clubs. None of us were big enough to play the theatre, but it was really cool. There were a lot of young people who had similar goals of being in a rock band and we'd all go to each other's shows. It was a really supportive and nurturing place."

Was it odd when the big labels and the media came calling?
"For sure, by the time Soundgarden got signed by A&M, Mother Love Bone got signed [by PolyGram] and then we got signed by Columbia; it rolled from there. At some point the entire world became aware of our little town and it was different after that. We were all happy just to sell out the Central Tavern and then… it's hard to put into words. We were just a little town and we were suddenly being looked at by people that we never could have imagined would even know we existed."

Your connection with Layne, the way your voices melded together, was such a huge part of Alice In Chains. How natural and easy a connection was that?
"Layne was just an amazing talent. He had a real unique and powerful voice, but he had a sensitivity and touch to it as well. The way that I wrote and the way that he wrote blended together so well, we felt like a natural fit. He had more horsepower than me, I'm not going to be able to do the Brian Johnson gargled razor blades, but together we had something that the other didn't. Think of The Beatles, Floyd, the Eagles, that attitude of, 'You take this line and I'll take that one' – it adds more colour to the canvas. Someone reviewed us once and called us 'The Satanic Everly Brothers', which I thought was pretty cool."

"SOMEONE CALLED US 'THE SATANIC EVERLY BROTHERS'"

The legacy of 1992's *Dirt* as a classic album, and one of the darkest albums in history, is set in stone at this point. How do you feel about it today?
"Well, dark… it is what it is. It's probably the most focused we've ever been, the most complete record we've made, it's a brutal record with some real force, and I mean that in a very good way. People cared about it, it spoke of a time and a place, we really never pulled any punches. Which is good and bad; it's good artistically, but it's bad because if you are going to be that honest then you'll struggle to live it down. It's an amazing record, it's probably our crowning achievement."

1994's *Jar Of Flies* was the first EP ever to top the Billboard Top 200. That's an incredible achievement.
"Yeah, it's pretty wild. We had this idea between *Facelift* and *Dirt* that we had these acoustic songs kicking around, and we were known for more powerful and hard-hitting stuff, and that became *Sap*, which we thought of as a little Easter egg for the fans. So, we decided to do it again between *Dirt* and the self-titled album, and that was *Jar Of Flies*.

"In a lot of ways, it's maybe become as definitive to our career as *Dirt*. A lot of people really liked that EP, the only one to have ever hit No.1, it's pretty wild. We knocked Mariah Carey off of the No.1 spot – sense of pride for us! She was married to Tommy Mottola, who was the president of our record label, so I'm sure that was a fun night in their household that week! Mariah going, 'Who the fuck are these guys?!' Ha ha ha ha! It was just a good five- or six-year window where rock was king, and that doesn't happen that much, when you get even the pop people celebrating rock and it being the number one thing. It was probably the last time that happened."

The 1995 self-titled record also got to No.1, but that was a difficult time for the band, wasn't it?
"Well, we didn't get the chance to tour that record, so we missed out on that opportunity. There were some really important songs on that record – *Grind, Over Now, Heaven Beside You* – and we never got to play them because we were coming apart at the seams. There is a real melancholy to that record because I don't think any of us knew where we were going, it wasn't looking good, and it proved to be our last record as that line-up."

And the songs that became 1998's *Boggy Depot* were ideas for the next Alice In Chains album, right?
"I'm always writing, always, so I'm sure some of those riffs and those ideas were things that I was going to be bringing into the Alice camp for whatever we were going to do next. But not everything works for this band, we have things that we bring in that aren't strictly right – 'I don't know if that's right, I don't know if that's Alice', you know? But, since we weren't going to tour, and it didn't look like we were going to tour for a while, I took the chance to make the record.

"I was lucky enough to have the support of Sean [Kinney, AIC drummer], otherwise I probably wouldn't have done it. He's my best friend and my confidant in this band, so it was important to have him onboard. And Mike [Inez, bass] as well. I got to invite a bunch of my favourite friends and bassists down, [Pantera's] Rex Brown and [Primus's] Les Claypool, as well as Inez, so it was great. It scared the hell out of me, though! I've never been the guy at the front and centre of the stage and that is really by design. It was a change, but I think it was a good thing to do, because it's a really interesting and cool rock record." ▶

Alice In Chains (left to right): Mike Inez, William DuVall, Jerry Cantrell, Sean Kinney

JUSTIN BORUCKI

"THE BAND WERE COMING APART AT THE SEAMS"

Presumably Alice In Chains were still a band in your mind, even if you were inactive?
"Yeah, I mean the plan was always to go back to Alice… I always held out hope. But you're also aware it can go the other way; bands aren't built to last, man. Those bands who last 30 years, you know they are the outliers and you know how hard it is to keep putting it back together again and again. So, I knew that there was a very good chance that we had reached that end point."

What was it like stepping back onstage with Alice In Chains when you reformed in 2005?
"We did it in Seattle for a benefit for the [Indian Ocean] tsunami back when that happened. It was inspiring to see people help human beings that they didn't know. Imagine that; we could use a bit more of that these days. We kicked around the idea of what we could do, and we thought that this would be a good way to do it, it'll be weird and tough, but fun, and it'll be for a good cause.

"We got together and invited some friends and we did it, and it was all of those things, really tough, hard, weird, sad… but also really cool. At the end of it we started thinking about maybe jamming with each other a little more. I invited William [DuVall, current AIC singer] down, because I'd done some stuff with him on [second solo album] *Degradation Trip*, and it snowballed from there. "The second half of our career is completely different from the first half, but it's pretty much the same at the same time; we go back to the very start of this interview, you go where it feels right. You've walked these roads before, and your brothers have been there with you, and when time comes to celebrate, you do it with your fucking buddies. You can't lose that way; you did some stuff, you did it with your friends, you stuck to your guns and some people fucking responded to it and they still stick with you today."

Of all the guest spots that you've done, have you got a personal favourite?
"When Chino [Moreno, Deftones] asked me to play a solo on *Phantom Bride*. He sent me that tune over and I liked it and I threw him over some ideas, which he thought were really cool. I went down to the studio and it was really emotional and heavy in a really cool way. Seeing him respond to having me in there, and having him direct me, it worked, and it was an important moment. I dig those guys, they're really talented. I really dig that Danzig album that I was on [1996's *Blackacidevil*], too!"

You've had a fair few acting roles. Surely you're the only alternative rock artist to have been in an Oscar-winning film, with *Jerry Maguire*? So, are you the grunge Marlon Brando?
"Ha ha ha! I've made a couple of cameos here and there; I really am interested in film, I've done a lot of soundtrack work as well, and that marriage fascinates me. But, grunge Marlon Brando? No, you'd have to give that to Gavin [Rossdale, Bush frontman]. If you're going to pick a guy from my era who has made a decent career out of acting, then he's probably the guy over me."

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VENOM PRISON ARE DEATH METAL'S MOST VITAL VOICE

From challenging gender conceptions to confronting death, racism and the refugee crisis, they're refusing to let mainstream recognition dampen their message

WORDS: ALEC CHILLINGWORTH • PICTURES: GOBINDER JHITTA

Larissa Stupar is doing all right. She's about to release another shit-hot record with Venom Prison, has just got married to the love of her life, and is expecting a baby boy in March. It's all a bit wholesome.

"When I announced my pregnancy on Instagram, someone commented, 'Uterine Industrialisation', which is one of our songtitles'," the vocalist says. Ah. "I just replied, 'Thanks for comparing me to a birthing machine. Very kind of you.' The person deleted it and commented again, just saying, 'Congratulations.'"

People get pregnant all the time. Half the human population is female, and as the Bloodhound Gang so profoundly spake, we ain't nothin' but mammals. But matey boy from Cannibal Corpse isn't carrying a foetus around for nine months. Danzig doesn't breastfeed, as far as we know. When male bandmembers become parents, they'll probably miss a show or two. Then they're back on the road.

"I don't think this should be treated any differently because I'm a woman," Larissa adds. "We just don't see this very often within metal bands because there aren't that many women. We're going to have to take some time off, but we still want to make Download festival possible. It means something to us as a band, me as part of the band, and me as a mother. Venom Prison is part of who I am, and I'm not ready to give it up."

"I'M NOT READY TO GIVE THIS UP"

She speaks with that nervous positivity you only really get from parents-to-be, which is refreshingly at odds with her band's brutal outlook. Formed in 2015, Venom Prison blossomed from Larissa's involvement in anti-fascist hardcore. A Welsh band, with a Russian-born vocalist who had spent her teenage years protesting against actual Nazis in Germany? Yeah, they ruffled some feathers and were nails as fuck.

Debut album *Animus* kicked up a stink in 2016. Its fetid blend of death metal and hardcore was a welcome waft, as was its explicit artwork, which upset conservative death metallers by depicting women castrating a man and feeding him the gloop. *Samsara* arrived three years later, packing chonkier riffs, upscaled production and better songs.

Across just a few years, they opened for Trivium on a massive European tour, brought all the pyro to Bloodstock's main stage and signed to one of metal's most prominent labels, Century Media. Excluding *Primeval* – a collection of re-recorded demos and two new songs, released in late 2020 – album number three, *Erebos*, is their first 'proper' record on Century Media. It doesn't skimp on the grimness.

"In Greek mythology, Erebos was the very first primordial God that created darkness from nothing," says Larissa. "From chaos. It fit the themes and how we experienced the last two years – this darkness born from chaos."

But Venom Prison is as Venom Prison does, and highfalutin concepts about gods and epic shit are ten a penny; that's what normal metal bands do. When *Erebos* was announced, the group cited a real-life 'repetition of the cycle of violence' that spreads beyond that mythical mayhem.

"There's so much going on in the world in regards to politics," Larissa elaborates. "Black Lives Matter, refugees in the UK – they died crossing in that freezer [in 2019, when 39 people died travelling in the back of a refrigerated lorry in Essex]. In America, people are being incarcerated just because they aren't wanted there. They're separated from their children. Families are broken up. There was a whistleblower who revealed that women were experiencing medical procedures they never agreed to – their wombs were being taken out."

This topic of discrimination is something they touch on directly in the record's lead single, *Judges Of The Underworld: 'Guilty as charged, a childhood of abandonment and desolation / Adolescence filled with guns, institutionalisation / Who is to blame?'*

"In America, for example, people are born into poverty, violence, and neglect, and they're stuck there," Larissa says. "They're cheated by the system. They experience it as the victim, the offender and the witness at the same time. Then as soon as they go into the prison system, they're completely fucked. Because even after you leave, you're placed back into the same environment you came from, and you have no chance to get out of the cycle."

This is all worthy discussion material. Thankfully, Erebos rams the message down your throat by being the most diverse, grand and catchy thing Venom Prison have slapped their name on. Sure, it's still death metal. But it's immediately melodic, nodding to seminal albums such as At The Gates' *Slaughter Of The Soul* and Carcass's *Heartwork*. Orchestral flourishes flit through tracks, composed by the band's guitarist, Ben Thomas. Solos reign supreme. There are proper singalong choruses.

"With *Animus* and *Samsara*, we just wanted to establish our sound because we were a new band," Larissa explains. "This time around, it wasn't about doing 'just another death metal record'. I'm personally not interested in listening to someone who writes the same 10 songs every two years."

She goes on, quickly citing Bring Me The Horizon. "They've evolved from a tiny deathcore band to playing some of the biggest venues in the UK. They keep changing their sound, and they just don't give a fuck."

It's apt that she brings them up, as Venom Prison's latest work shares one clear trait with Oli Sykes' Steel City ruffians: the introduction of clean vocals. Larissa had experimented with some strangled, semi-clean lines on 2020's *Slayer Of Holofernes*, but they were more in keeping with someone like Cattle Decapitation's Travis Ryan. They were 'sung' vocals in the same way stubbing your toe 'kinda hurts'. Clean passages can be found in pockets of *Erebos*, but most prominently on the eerie, quasi-ballad *Pain Of Oizys*. Aside from singing in choirs as a kid, this was the first time Larissa had approached vocals from this angle.

"You can't go in and just sing, even if you're meeting the notes," she explains. "You need to have the soul and emotion that connects you to the lyrics. I really struggled with that to start with – I was stuck recording for three hours, and just ended up crying and stopping for the day.

Venom Prison: essential, make no myth-take

"I'd love to use more clean vocals in the future," she admits. "I don't think we'll make clean-only songs, but I'm planning on learning how to sing properly. I want to connect with my own voice more; I'm confident with screaming, and I want the same feeling when it comes to clean vocals."

In terms of what's next, Venom Prison are primed to cleave metal fans' ears. *Erebos* is still uncompromising and heavy, but offers so much more. Trivium took a punt on the band in 2018, and Venom Prison were set to open for Parkway Drive at Wembley Arena in 2020 – they've since had to drop out of the rescheduled dates. Popular bands cottoned onto Venom Prison's potential, and now it's time for everyone else to play catch-up. "It shows that there is a place for an extreme band in the more mainstream part of metal," Larissa confirms.

Bigger songs, bigger tours, and a bigger platform mean that Venom Prison's socially conscious, politically sharp values can reach more people. UK death metal legends such as Carcass, Bolt Thrower and Napalm Death have touched similar nerves throughout their careers, but now the world's caught up, as issues such as racial and sexual violence are more widely scrutinised by the public.

The latter topic is something Venom Prison have attacked and dissected with a laser-sharp lyrical focus. Despite the ripples caused by #MeToo, the Marilyn Manson allegations and more, Larissa still believes there's work to be done. "It might accelerate the process, but we still have a long way to go," she sighs, referencing the Manson case.

"THEIR WOMBS WERE BEING TAKEN OUT"

At the time of writing, sexual assault charges have been raised against the shock rocker, and the police have searched his home. "I like Kanye West as an artist, so it was disappointing to see him collaborate with Marilyn Manson [on West's new album, *Donda*]," Larissa continues. "I understand where he's coming from as a Christian. He believes that people deserve forgiveness, and they can find God and, I don't know, transcend into being a better person or whatever. I wish that Kanye would take the same compassion he has for Marilyn Manson and apply it to the people who accused Manson of doing these awful things.

"Fans often side with artists instead of trying to see the perspective of the people who accused them," she finishes. "They just don't care. It's naive and blind. There are still people out there listening to Lostprophets; they have millions of plays on Spotify. Some people are just completely fucked."

It's a sombre note to end on, but it's this kind of real-world horror that Venom Prison draw from. It's what they fight for. Fuck the patriarchy, fuck racists, fuck abusers and fuck anyone who thinks they're above others.

This attitude brought so much acclaim and outcry when *Animus* arrived. Hiatus or no, baby in tow, *Erebos* confirms their relevance. It's the kind of record that deserves to be heard on the main stage at Download, not the fourth. It's what will make them the UK's essential extreme band.

***EREBOS* IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 4 VIA CENTURY MEDIA. VENOM PRISON WILL PLAY DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL ON JUNE 11**

Larissa is going to be one badass mother

GOD TIER

Learn about the Greek deities Larissa namechecks on *Erebos*, like an EreBoss

OIZYS

Oizys was the goddess of misery, anxiety and suffering, considered a malevolent spirit by all accounts. She was also the daughter of Nyx (goddess of night) and her consort Erebos, the personification of the deep darkness and shadows

FEATURED ON: *Pain Of Oizys*

HESPERIDES

The Hesperides were nymphs of the sunset, and guarded a bunch of golden apples. They weren't very observant – a hundred-headed dragon was employed as a bouncer, and yet Heracles still nicked the apples.

FEATURED ON: *Golden Apples Of The Hesperides*

GORGONS

We're in greatest hits territory now. You know the Gorgon sisters! Stheno, Euryale and Medusa? Given snakes for hair by Athena. Yeah, it's a look. It turns out that, of the three, Medusa was the only one who wasn't immortal. Tough shit.

FEATURED ON: *Gorgon Sisters*

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Welcome To BLOODYWOOD

Ahead of their debut album, we asked internet-breaking New Delhi metallers Bloodywood to give us the ultimate guide to the places that made them

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURES: ADELINE L. JANOVICZ

New Delhi is a sensory explosion – a sprawling, frantic mass of people, smells and racket that spills out in every direction. Traversing the city's tangled, jam-packed streets is equal parts frustrating and exhilarating, but for Karan Katiyar, that barely contained chaos is home, and he ain't about to let anyone talk trash about his town.

"I get very defensive about Delhi," the Bloodywood guitarist, songwriter and founder says with a wide smile. "It gets a bad reputation because we tend to be the loudest and the rowdiest. But you've got to go with the flow. Everything is normal, nothing is out of place. It might seem like that but that's how it is. I've been to other parts of India, but nothing feels as home as Delhi."

The bustle and colour of India's capital seeps into every note of Bloodywood's vivid, euphoric blend of nu metal and traditional Punjabi instrumentation. Coupled with inspirational lyrics that spread a message of the beauty in diversity, Karan and his bandmates, singer Jayant Bhadula and rapper Raoul Kerr, have created an addictive, intoxicating sound that's booted them right to the top of metal's ones-to-watch list.

In 2019, the video for the band's track *Ari Ari*, which contained, among other madness, Karan shredding on the back of a camel, went viral with more than 5.5 million Youtube views and counting. After a long wait, their debut album, *Rakshak*, is finally ready to drop.

"We have a very run-and-gun mentality when it comes to making music," explains Raoul. "We'd always make a track, shoot the video, then upload it all in the span of a few months. So, to go from that to creating a full body of work, we'd never done that before."

With a UK and European tour booked for March, followed by Bloodstock fest in the summer, Bloodywood are taking 2022 head-on. Before that, though, we asked them to talk us through the places and activities that have defined them - from their vibrant hometown and beyond.

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TEA IS METAL

Karan: "The tea is called chai – it's basically tea, milk, and a lot of spices like cardamom, cloves, cinnamon and ginger. If the human body is 60% water, the Indian body is 30% tea. We are in [South Delhi neighbourhood] Hauz Khas village, which is where we shot the video for *Ari Ari*. It's the centre point between all our houses. When we go out in the morning, we probably will be having tea. The dog is a street dog. When we are having street food, these guys come around and make all these cute faces."

MAKING NOISE

Karan: "The studio here is at my house. We lived together for a few weeks, during the very last phase of the album, when we were adding the finishing touches. Almost everything was done remotely when it comes to songwriting, but all of the recording, mixing and mastering happened here. The instrument Jayant is holding [on the sofa] is a tumbi [a one-string Punjabi folk instrument]. He's not actually playing it! This makes the typical Punjabi sound; people always think it's a sitar, but it's a tumbi."

IN THE MARKET

Karan: "Me and Jayant used to meet at Pandara Market because that was the closest to our houses. In a way the band was born there. That's where we sat and decided to shoot our own videos, and where we decided to introduce the whole Punjabi element into our music. From day one the plan was to make music that other people cared about. We started out as a cover band trying to make metal versions of pop songs, but that was just a lot of testing and building an audience. The plan to shift to being an original band was there from day one."

HUNGER GAMES

Raoul: "In the [right-hand] picture we are eating chicken egg Kathi rolls. It's like a packed and flavourful wrap with wild sauces, which you will only find in India. They aren't even bottled [sauces]; it's just some concoction that they made themselves."

Karan: "You know the stereotype about street food in Delhi that it's not very hygienic? My theory is that, because they probably wash the utensils that they use to make the rolls once a day, all the flavours get absorbed into the utensils and as the day progresses, the food gets tastier."

GEARING UP

Karan: "In this picture Raoul is holding a custom case that we ordered for the mixer we will be taking on tour this year. There's not a lot of expertise in India to make these things; we've got to get them imported. It cost more than I'd like to admit. The mixer we're going to use this time on tour is the Waves eMotion LV. It's one of the most advanced digital mixers out there."

▲▼ WILD THINGS

Karan: "All of these are from the video for *Aaj* [in Kerala]. The location for each music video depends on the song, but we always want to show a part of India. We don't have to build a set because India is a huge set on its own. Out on the streets there is always something interesting happening."
Raoul: "*Aaj* is a song about pushing your limits and rising to the next level. It sounds untamed and open. We got mummified in red tape [to shoot these pictures]. So many permissions were needed, we were running black ops missions at 5am trying to get these shots. But it was worth it."

◀ PANCAKES AND CHILL

Karan: "Here, we're eating dosas [Indian pancakes] in a south Indian restaurant in Lodhi Colony, at Old Meharchand Market. We've shot seven music videos over there. It's a hot spot to shoot music videos because it's got lots of murals."
Raoul: "We spend hours in the studio working on new music, so it's important to take a break. Can you think of a more wholesome way to do that than beating the shit out of each other in *Tekken 7*? Or riding nitrous-fuelled motorcycles and beheading gangsters in *Road Redemption*? We think not."

***RAKSHAK* IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 18 VIA BLOODYWOOD MEDIA**

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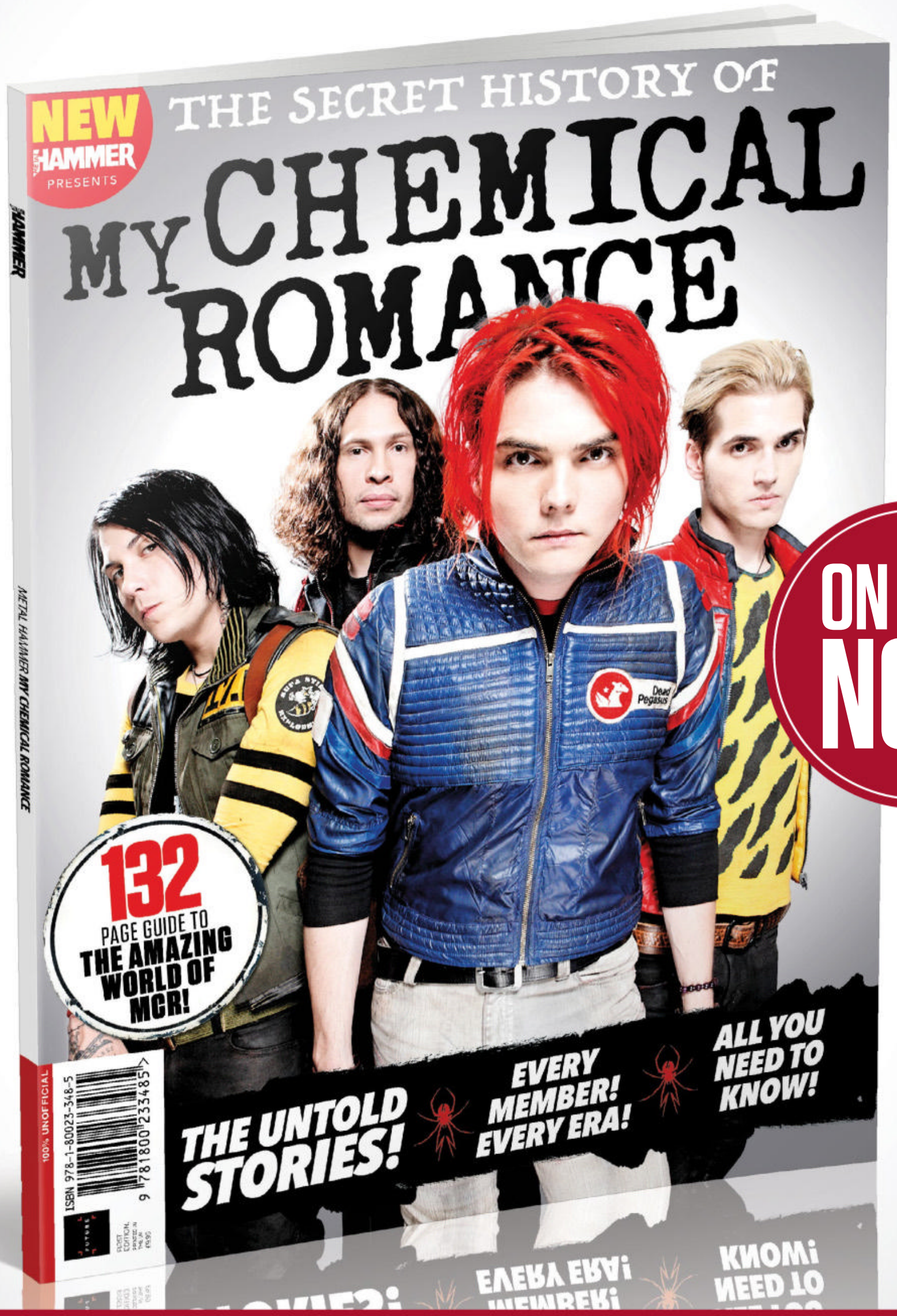

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WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT BATHORY

Thomas 'Quorthon' Forsberg's legendary 'band' helped define two entire subgenres and are cited as inspirations by everyone from Watain to Enslaved. So why were they so underappreciated in their heyday?

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

PG BRUNELLI//CONICPIX

On June 3, 2004, the body of Thomas Forsberg was found in his apartment in a suburb of Stockholm. The 38-year-old had died of an undiagnosed heart defect, but beyond that, little was known about the circumstances of his last few days, or his death.

It was a tragedy that someone so young had passed away so unexpectedly, but the lack of detailed information about his death was strangely appropriate. Thomas Forsberg was better known as Quorthon, founder and sole member of Bathory, the cult 'band' who helped spark two distinct genres into life during the first seven years of their career: black metal and Viking metal.

Yet by 2004, Bathory were a marginal act – not quite forgotten, but certainly overlooked by the wider metal community despite a run of six classic albums that began with 1984's landmark self-titled debut and ended with 1991's epic *Twilight Of The Gods*. This was partly down to Quorthon himself – he refused to play live, rarely did photo sessions and peppered his early interviews with obfuscation, misdirection and half-truths. In life, as in death, Thomas 'Quorthon' Forsberg was an enigma.

"Nobody was doing the stuff he was doing back then – he was black metal before black metal was invented," says Watain frontman and Bathory devotee Erik Danielsson, who was introduced to the band as an 11-year-old in the early 90s by a friend's older sister, who played him their third album, 1987's *Under The Sign Of The Black Mark*. "He was such an influential musician in so many ways, but he was a conundrum even to the friends who knew him back then."

One person who did know Quorthon was Jonas Åkerlund, the acclaimed filmmaker and video director who's famed for his work with Metallica, Rammstein, Madonna and more. As a 17-year-old metalhead and aspirant drummer growing up in the suburbs of Stockholm, Jonas was a founder member of Bathory's original line-up.

"Me and my cousin Frederick [Melander], who played the bass, were looking for a guitarist and a singer, so we put an advert in our local music store and he saw it," says Jonas. "Literally the first time we met him, we saw this guy with chicken bones hanging from his neck, he had ballet tights on, kind of pink and black striped. Me and Frederick were, like, 'Oh man, I hope it's not that guy.' But when we started playing, we were blown away. Ace was such an amazing musician."

> **"HE HAD CHICKEN BONES HANGING FROM HIS NECK"**
> JONAS ÅKERLUND, FILMMAKER

Even today, almost 40 years after they met, Jonas still calls his old friend 'Ace' – a nickname the teenager gave himself in honour of Ace Frehley, guitarist with his beloved Kiss (the only band Quorthon loved more than Kiss were The Beatles, whom he unironically called "the greatest thing ever to happen to the music scene").

Jonas paints a picture of an insular but intelligent 17-year-old kid. "Ace never left the house," he says. "Me and Frederick actually dragged him out. But he was a smart guy – he had a lot of thoughts and opinions, and he was funny too."

Myth-making was also one of Quorthon's many talents: he claimed to have played in a punk band in his early teens, but there's little hard evidence to back that up. Bathory's own beginnings have become similarly shrouded in mystery. One of the key parts of the Bathory mythology is that they played a handful of live shows in their early days, before Quorthon dispensed with the idea of performing in public entirely. According to Jonas, there's a grain of truth in the suggestion.

"We played at an afterparty, if you want to call that a gig," says Jonas. "And we always had people hanging out in the rehearsal studios, so we kind of did shows. But we didn't do any official gigs."

What the trio definitely did do was record two tracks – *Sacrifice* and *The Return Of The Darkness And Evil* – for the 1984 compilation album *Scandinavian Metal Attack*. Echoing the wall-of-warped-noise template laid down a few years earlier by Venom (a band Quorthon, perhaps disingenuously, claimed to never have heard at the time despite the fact they had a song called *Countess Bathory*), the Swedes' gargled vocals, lower-than-lo-fi production and occult-leaning lyrics placed Bathory squarely on metal's most extreme fringes.

Scandinavian Metal Attack was released on Tyfon Grammofon, owned by Swedish music industry veteran Börje 'Boss' Forsberg. Such was the secrecy that surrounded both Bathory and Quorthon himself in their early days that few were aware that Boss was Thomas Forsberg's father. Boss set up a subsidiary label, Black Mark, especially for his son, that would release every Bathory album until Quorthon's death, with both Forsbergs co-producing each one.

"Boss was a big influence on Quorthon's career," says Mark Ruffneck, vocalist with the Finnish band Oz, who appeared on *Scandinavian Metal Attack*, and one-time lodger at the Forsbergs' apartment. "He put out the Bathory records when no one else probably would have."

By the time Bathory's self-titled debut album was released in October 1984, Jonas Åkerlund and Frederick Melander had left the band. "I wasn't that good a drummer," says Jonas with a laugh. According to Quorthon, the album itself was recorded in 36 hours for 2,000 Swedish Krona – less than £200. It caused minor ripples in the handful of metal magazines that existed at the time, though in those pre-necro times, most found the raw extremity of tracks such as *Hades* and *Necromansy* comic. It wouldn't be until years later that the brutal innovation of *Bathory* and its follow-ups *The Return.....* and *Under The Sign Of The Black Mark* would be recognised.

"There was a raw, Satanic darkness to them," says Watain's Erik Danielsson. "Those records will always be there in the fundament of the black metal genre. They are so important."

Ironically, Quorthon himself expressed little interest in the bands he had influenced. "Ace never really liked the Norwegian black metal scene," says Jonas Åkerlund, who stayed in contact with his old friend long after he left Bathory. "He didn't like the idea of not being able to separate the fantasy from the reality."

Those early albums credited various bassists and drummers, though Quorthon was cagey in interviews about who else was actually in the band, sometimes alluding to other musicians, sometimes deflecting the question. Jonas believes his old friend took care of pretty much everything himself.

"This is my take on it: I don't think there was ever any other musician in Bathory," he says. "I know they took a few pictures early on – one of the people is actually Quorthon's brother – and there were a couple of guys hanging round. But it was always Ace."

By 1985, Quorthon was already shunning the sound he'd helped create and his teenage interest in Satanism, subsequently telling journalists that he had started listening to nothing but classical music. It may have been another yarn spun to keep himself entertained, but by 1988's *Blood Fire Death* album, Bathory were beginning to change, bringing in elements of what would be known today as Viking metal. It was a concept Quorthon would develop on 1990's *Hammerheart* and 1991's *Twilight Of The Gods*.

"People talk about 'Viking metal', but we don't really know what Viking music sounded like," says Enslaved frontman Ivar Bjørnson. "For me, *Hammerheart* is the ultimate sound of that – it's so raw and at the same time so melodic and beautiful. It's all-encompassing."

For all Bathory's later influence, their albums barely registered outside the metal underground, even as the black metal scene that had been so inspired by Bathory began its march to notoriety. Perversely, while he was being held up as the scene's founding father, Quorthon ▶

Playing with fire: Quorthon, a metal renaissance man

TONY MOTTRAM/ICONICPIX

himself was changing musical lanes: 1994's *Requiem* and 1995's *Octagon* were mid-paced thrash albums that felt several years behind the curve, while a pair of solo records completely threw what remained of Bathory's fanbase for a loop – 1994's *Album* nodded towards Quorthon's love of glam, while 1997's *Purity Of Essence* was even more bizarre, bearing the imprint of both grunge and Britpop (widely scorned at the time, it features some tremendous songs).

"I can't say I enjoyed those albums musically," says Watain's Erik Danielsson, "but they underline what a creative and single-minded person he was. I get the impression that a lot of things he did were on a whim, they weren't calculated. He did what he enjoyed and did it from his heart."

By the new millennium, Bathory had begun edging back to more familiar ground. Where 2001's *Destroyer Of Worlds* was a halfway house between their mid-90s thrash sound and the Viking metal of half a decade earlier, the *Nordland I* and *II* albums from 2002 and 2003 fully embraced the latter style, albeit with a souped-up production.

It would be nice to say that Bathory were experiencing a career resurgence by the time of Quorthon's death in 2004, but that would be inaccurate. That run of early albums remained cult favourites among the extreme metal faithful, and their name appeared on the t-shirts of more clued-up metal fans, but Bathory were largely ignored by the mainstream metal press, *Metal Hammer* included.

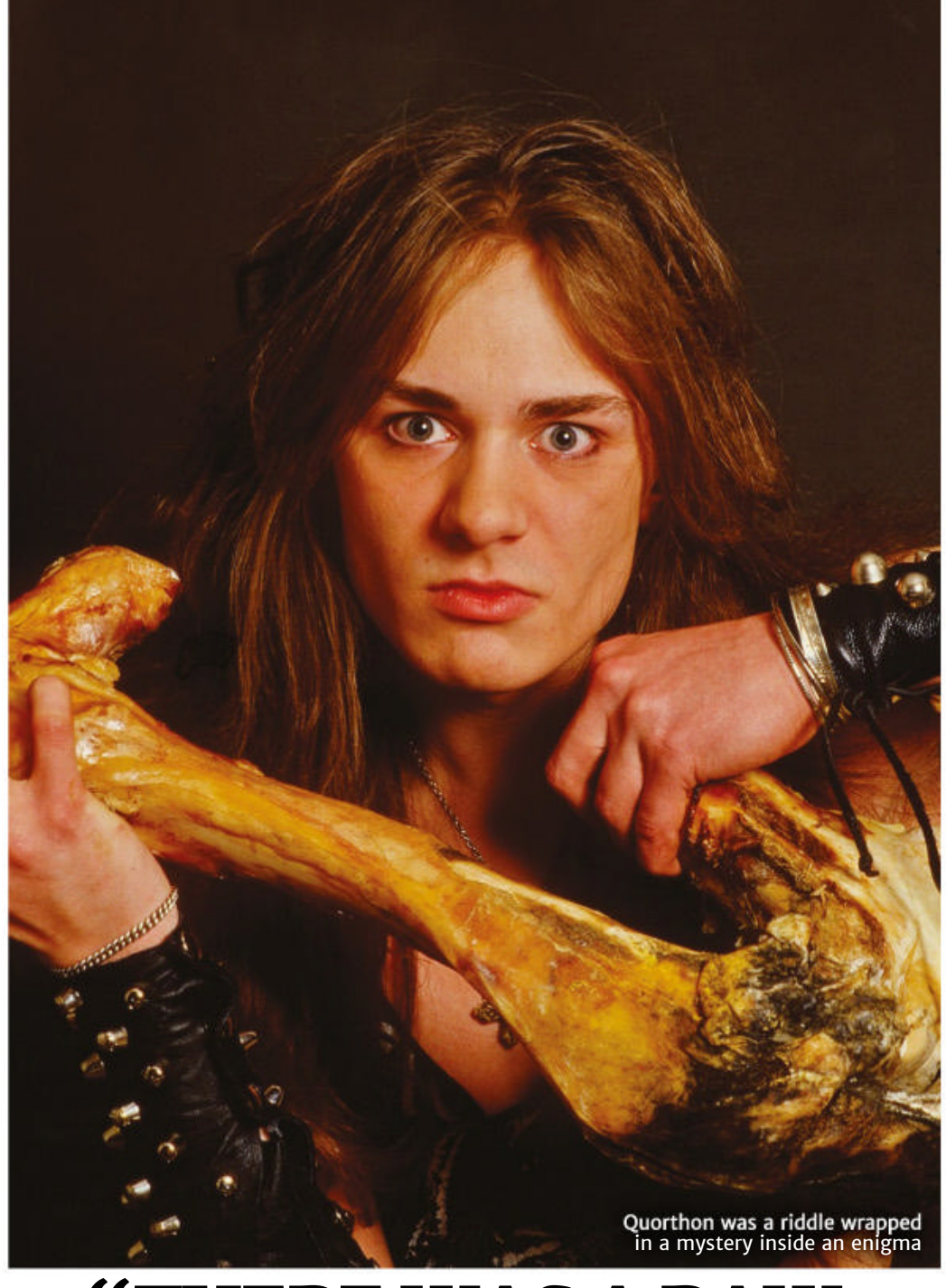
Quorthon himself seemed blasé about the situation. In 1995, he spoke to future Sunn O))) mastermind Stephen O'Malley for the latter's fanzine, *Descent*. "Bathory won't be around in 10 years from now," he said prophetically. "I can't tell you when the end will come… It could be possible that I decide to end it next month or in five years from now."

In the end, the decision was taken out of his hands. His death in 2004 put a full stop on the career of this most singular of musicians, simultaneously preserving the enigma that he'd built up around himself. In subsequent years, the broader metal community has begun to acknowledge Bathory's importance and influence. In 2010, Watain played a six-song Bathory set at the Sweden Rock Festival, introduced by 'Boss' Forsberg, carrying a flaming torch.

"We saw it as an opportunity to give people a bit of a history lesson," says Erik Danielsson. "There was still no real understanding of Quorthon's legacy in Sweden at that time. We were inspired by his vision in general, so it was fitting. And on top of everything Boss agreed to introduce the show. It gives me goosebumps just thinking about it." (Boss himself died in 2017).

Jonas Åkerlund stayed in contact with Quorthon long after he left Bathory to pursue film-making – he says one of his big regrets was never making a video for them, despite the pair talking about it.

"Ace never cared about the size of his career, it was all about the creativity," he says. "And creatively, he had so much more to give. There was no stopping that guy. I wish that's one of the things I could tell him now: 'Dude, you're fucking brilliant.'" H



Quorthon was a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma

"THERE WAS A RAW, SATANIC DARKNESS TO THEM"

ERIK DANIELSSON, WATAIN

SWEDISH METAL ATTACK

Where to start with Bathory and Quorthon

THE LO-FI CLASSIC
Bathory (1984)
The one that started it all – not just Bathory's career, but arguably the wave of lo-fi blackened thrash that followed. It cost just 200 quid to make and it showed – the result made forebears Venom sound like Queen. But what the album lacked in finesse, it more than made up for in impact. Quorthon's vocals, in particular, were important in establishing black metal.

THE BLACK METAL LANDMARK
Under The Sign Of The Black Mark (1987)
The apex of Bathory's original 'black metal trilogy' (which also included the eponymous debut album and *The Return……*). With his producer/father 'Boss' Forsberg at his side and a drum machine set to 'kill', Quorthon served up a hurricane of ear-rattling noise that raised the bar on viciousness.

THE VIKING METAL MILESTONE
Hammerheart (1990)
Having helped invent black metal, Quorthon decided it was time to cook up another genre: Viking metal. He dipped his toes in the water on 1988's *Blood Fire Death*, but *Hammerheart* was the point where he properly began incorporating both melody and mythology into Bathory's music. If Richard Wagner made metal albums, they would sound like this.

THE MASTERPIECE
Twilight Of The Gods (1991)
Any of Bathory's first six albums could be held up as their finest, but the final entry in their 'Viking Trilogy' run has more right to that claim than any. More refined than anything that came before it without sacrificing its elemental power, *Twilight Of The Gods* is the quintessential Viking metal album – and the quintessential Bathory album.

THE WILD CARD
Purity Of Essence (1997)
A controversial choice – Quorthon's second solo album was slated for its dalliances with grunge and Oasis-on-a-shoestring indie rock (hey, he was a Beatles fan long before Noel Gallagher). Listen without prejudice, and it's a great late-90s alt-rock record – and come on, since when was Quorthon going to listen to what anyone else thought anyway, hmmm?

RAY PALMER ARCHIVE/ICONICPIX

For the stories behind the best albums and the bands that produced them...

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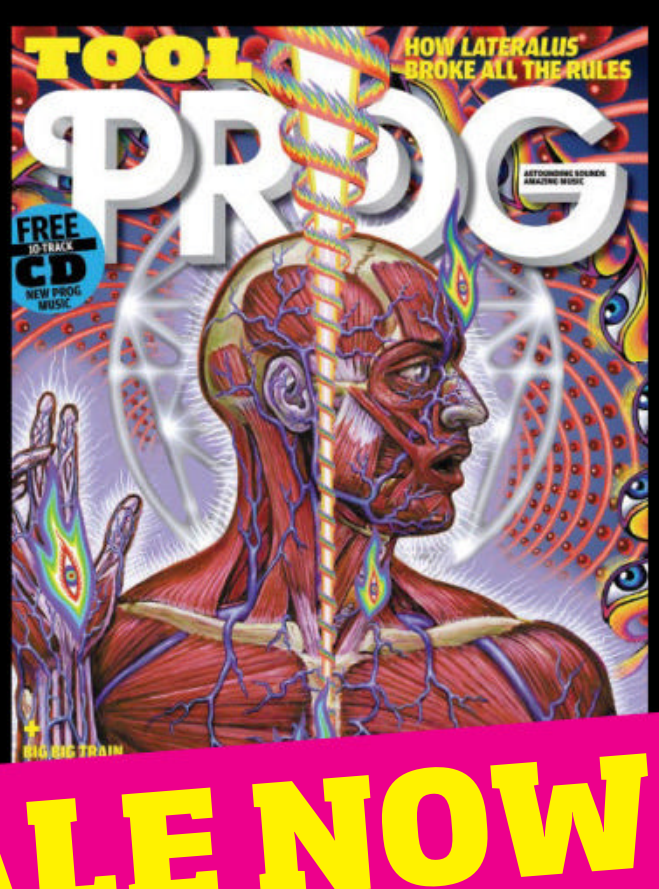

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY

Korn refocus their energies after the turbulence of *The Nothing*

KORN

Requiem

LOMA VISTA

Bakersfield's nu metal pioneers get back to basics in style

IT'S MORE THAN a little unusual for a band of Korn's standing to have to approach an album at this point in their career – the Bakersfield legends' 14th studio record – as the follow-up to a genuinely essential piece of work. But 2019's *The Nothing* was a fantastic, if heartbreaking, record, detailing themes of loss, grief and depression in a manner as starkly effecting as anything the band had put their name to since 1994's legend-creating self-titled debut. To add to the pot of pressures, this feasibly could be beloved bassist Fieldy's last recorded outing with the band, with Korn confirming he had gone on hiatus from the group in November.

But Korn have never been a band afraid to change and adapt, and *Requiem* skilfully returns to the very essence of what Korn have been superb at for the last couple of decades into sharp focus. In a tight, taut, careering and propulsive nine songs over a mere 32 minutes, Korn remind their followers of what they do and how well they do it. Gone are the ambient, gothic or electronic experiments of *The Nothing* and 2011's divisive *The Path Of Totality*. Instead, we get monolithically hulking grooves, mud-thick guitar riffs that hit like a steel toe-capped boot to the cranium and Jonathan Davis's always recognisable crooned yelping turning on a sixpence to either a wounded wail or a deathly guttural growl.

"KORN HAVE NEVER BEEN AFRAID TO CHANGE AND ADAPT"

Opener *Forgotten* is a case in point. This is classic simmer-and-explode Korn, with a spidery riff driving everything along. Jonathan's clean chorus suckers onto your

PRESS

brain before a massive, table-flipping breakdown arrives and the band pummel their way to the finishing line. Yes, you've heard them do it many times before, but it's still undeniably potent. And while on paper the idea of Korn just going back to doing more… well… more Korn, essentially, might not raise eyebrows and get pulses racing, the anthemic belting of Jonathan on the huge chorus of *Start The Healing*, the scratchy, grinding riff of *Lost In The Grandeur* and the half-time grind and pound of *Helpless And Beaten* all deliver real thrills.

If there were to be a criticism of the record, it'd be the lack of the really wild and wide dynamic range that Korn have shown they are capable of in the past. You could argue that this is somewhat negated by the fact that this is the shortest album of Korn's career and, as such, it never causes your attention to wander. There's certainly a lesson to other bands about getting in, getting everything off your chest and getting out on *Requiem*. Less is very much more in this instance. Ultimately, due to their return to more familiar terrain, this may prove to be something of a transitional album for the Bakersfield boys. Creative minds as restless as theirs will surely experiment again in the future but, for now, let's enjoy Korn being Korn. Because, let's be honest, no one does it better than they do.

FOR FANS OF: Slipknot, Tetrarch, Mudvayne

STEPHEN HILL

ABHORIA
Abhoria
PROSTHETIC

US black/death debutants look around and lower the spirits

That Abhoria had never even played together until after their debut was recorded speaks to their by-the-book approach to blackened death. It's not bad by any stretch; there's a pointedly wicked violence to the slash-and-burn riffs on *Byzantine Promises* and *Grave Expectations*. More interesting are the lyrical aspirations; *Abhoria* inhabits a bleak dystopian world full of con artists (*Mountebank*), religious hypocrisy (*Unevangelized*) and a pervasive sense of despondence. Well-produced and technically impressive, it nonetheless leaves you wondering what kind of creative sparks this hard-hitting quartet could have created after a few months playing together on the road.

FOR FANS OF: Behemoth, Kataklysm, Vader

JOE DALY

ALLEGAEON
Damnum
METAL BLADE

Adventurous extreme metallers forge a new set of alliances

Allegaeon have long been praised for their technical brilliance, making it all the more surprising that *Damnum* marks the first time all five members have contributed to the song-writing. The result is the band's most cohesive record to date, whilst losing none of their instrumental talents. *Damnum* weaves through metal subgenres with joyous abandon whilst somehow still maintaining an extreme metal framework. *Of Beasts And Worms* offers a jubilant clean chorus that wouldn't be out of place on a recent Trivium record, while *Called Home* could sit snug on Opeth's *Ghost Reveries*. Bold as any album in Allegaeon's canon, *Damnum* is progressive and extreme in the truest sense.

FOR FANS OF: Orbit Culture, Alluvial, Opeth

RICH HOBSON

ARÐ
Take Up My Bones
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Winterfylleth member sets off on a saintly doom pilgrimage

The debut album by Winterfylleth keyboardist Mark Deeks is an epic doom concept following the relics of St Cuthbert around the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria. It's a niche subject that's palpably close to its creator's heart, the solemn passion and conviction ringing from every choral chant and power chord. Mark writes and performs everything except drums, lead guitar and cello. The latter is beautifully provided by Jo Quail, fresh from guest spots with My Dying Bride, At The Gates and Myrkur, whose sensitive dexterity helps the album attain a higher level of elegance and profundity. It was there already, though, the ebb and flow of the windswept doom structures artfully paralleling the narrative flow of the story.

FOR FANS OF: Bathory, Candlemass, My Dying Bride

CHRIS CHANTLER

Amorphis remain confident of their choice of musical direction

AMORPHIS
Halo
ATOMIC FIRE

Seasoned Finnish folksters still fighting the good fight

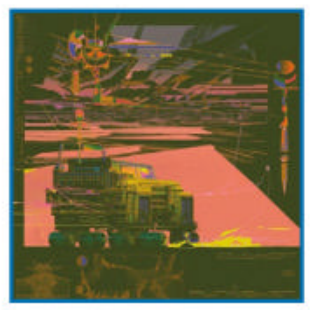
ESTABLISHED BANDS' LATTER-DAY musical output can go one of several ways, with a continued evolution or resolutely sticking to a formula being the most common routes. Either is fine, providing the results are worthwhile. From the evidence of their last few records, Amorphis seem happy to follow the second path, having found a unique niche with their fusion of styles. 2018's *Queen Of Time* certainly threw more caution to the wind with its implementation of sax and ever-more obscure folk melodies, but ultimately it was another triumph of familiarity and excellent songcraft.

Though album 14 is undoubtedly progressively minded, its increased focus on recognisable structures and unashamedly enticing hooks results in a host of anthems that the Finns' diehard admirers will take enormous delight in. In fact, the intriguing amalgamation of sweeping melodeath, traditional Scandinavian instruments and prog rock tropes has rarely sounded as assured as on *Halo*. Regal leads and Hammond organ melt away into the gorgeous stripped-back choruses of *Northwards*, *A New Land* and the title track, while *Windmane*'s determined stomp reaches its zenith with battling twin solos on both string and keys.

Tomi Joutsen may not have a voice sent from Olympus on his own, but such is the majesty of *The Moon*'s ethereal evolution and serene backing vocals that he sounds nothing less than imperious. Even from the nefarious stabs of *Seven Roads Come Together* spring a sense of grandiosity and an earworm that stealthily takes hold. The Eastern refrains of *War* and *On The Dark Waters* are the scenes of the most obvious experimentation, with neither losing the crucial criteria of providing an instantaneous rush. Many have argued that veteran bands continuing often tarnishes their impeccable legacy, but with Amorphis and their ilk continuing to deliver the goods, there'll always be an iron-clad defence.

FOR FANS OF: **Insomnium, Opeth, Dark Tranquillity**

ADAM REES



AUTHOR & PUNISHER
Krüller
RELAPSE

Inventively bleak industrial metal maestro expands his Tool-box

By creating his own clanking, whirring instrumentation Tristan Shone has brought together the worlds of music, design and engineering. *Krüller* sees friends, family and Tool's Danny Carey and Justin Chancellor come aboard for guest spots, but Shone remains very much the soul of this machine as he effortlessly blends ugly Godflesh-ian lurch with the pop-blasted nihilism of NIN. This said, there's been an interesting expansion of sound that accommodates a surprisingly rational Portishead cover and, with *Blacksmith*, the crackpot glitch of Warp Records. These elements don't necessarily make the experience any brighter, but they do allow Shone to paint his bleak, mono-chromatic visions with ever more subtle shades of grey.

FOR FANS OF: **Jesu, Blood From The Soul, Pitchshifter**

ALEX DELLER

BAD OMENS
The Death Of Peace Of Mind
SUMERIAN

Ambitious metalcore unit go overboard on the atmospherics

Filled with atmospheric calms, slick production, and high, melodic vocals, this album is as radio-friendly as Bad Omens get. Samples, breathy singing and electronic influences run throughout and *Just Pretend* boasts satisfyingly soaring vocals. *Like A Villain* adds screams and riffs to the mix, but a few tracks dip into dull, overly dreamy territory. Still, *What Do You Want From Me* and the awesome *Artificial Suicide* pick things up with some much-needed aggression and nods to Slipknot and NIN. The creative flair is fun, and vocalist Noah Sebastian displays an impressive range, but it's the ethereal songs that hold the album back.

FOR FANS OF: **Bring Me The Horizon, Slaves, Hands Like Houses**

NIK YOUNG

BANK MYNA
Volaverunt
STELLAR FREQUENCIES

Parisian post-rockers take a deep, entrancing dive into the esoteric

The first full-length from this Parisian act sees them spread their wings and soar – fitting, really, since the album's title translates to 'they flew away'. The five tracks here effortlessly ebb and flow, the trio apparently capable of marshalling smoke and candlelight into sonic form. Quiet, ambient tinkerings give way to darkened drones and whumping percussion, while strings, synths and bells bother the edges of perception. Central to it all is Maud Harribey's rich, pure voice, which steers and heightens the music as things move from wistful sighs to tsunamis of static-edged noise. Like Nadja gone post-rock or Big | Brave viewed through an obsidian prism, *Volaverunt* is a tantalising experience – mysterious, arcane and possessing hidden depths.

FOR FANS OF: **Hawthonn, Father Murphy, A Silver Mt Zion**

ALEX DELLER

PRESS

BENEATH THE SILENCE
Black Lights
PRIME COLLECTIVE

Melodically minded Danes wring drama out of despair

Beneath The Silence bring something new to the oft-tired melodic metal style. *Black Lights* explores the theme of hopelessness, guided by the powerful pipes of frontwoman Mette Hessellund. The sound is hearty and the hooks infectious on this debut album, with the brilliantly melodramatic standout *In The Shadow Of Your Eyes* coming across almost like a musical theatre ballad underneath all the stomping drums. The lyrics prove a little clichéd in places (lead single *Fear* resorts to describing the physical symptoms of the emotion rather than any deeper meaning), yet the album is saved time and again by Hessellund's refreshingly full-bodied vocal performance. Throughout 10 tracks, the quintet prove that it's crucial to headbang your way through even the darkest of times. We should probably take a leaf out of their book.

FOR FANS OF: Kobra And The Lotus, Daze Of June, Drown This City

ROSIE SOLOMON

BEYOND THE STYX
Sentence
WTF

Melodically minded Danes wring drama out of despair

These French bruisers clearly have absolutely no interest in hardcore's ever-changing musical landscape. Instead, the classic sound of mid-80s New York is enough to sustain them almost entirely. As such, you'll probably already know whether or not this album is to your tastes. But for those of you who want to hear the genre's classic sound in as crushing and brutal a form as is possible, then *Sentence* is an absolute blast. The half-time stomp and gang vocals of *New World Disorder* have been done a million times, but it's rarely sounded as feral as it does here, the touch of extreme metal riffing on *Self Hatred* is just gloriously grizzled and the 117 seconds of *Overload* feels like being in a prison riot. Great stuff.

FOR FANS OF: Terror, Harms Ways, Incendiary

STEPHEN HILL

BLOOD INCANTATION
Timewave Zero
CENTURY MEDIA

Cosmic death metal heroes head out on ambient curveball

Nobody would have blamed Blood Incantation for producing another *Hidden History Of The Human Race*. That album's glorious mix of psychedelic stargazing and pummelling brutality garnered deserved crossover appeal, but this enigmatic follow-up instead goes the way of guitarist/vocalist Paul Riedl's various ambient projects, trading riffs and battery for beatless, wraithlike synth-heavy tapestries. Of course, the band have also explored such territory before – check the intro to *Inner Paths (To Outer Space)* from *Hidden History...* – but never committed to it so fully. Here tonal, tidal ebb-and-flows ooze ominously while insectoid extra-terrestrials burble within honey-combed locales. Only momentary, mournful guitar arpeggios and sporadic cymbal splashes signal traces of human life. *Timewave Zero* is a bold, well-executed work, though pure-strain disciples may miss the sturm und drang of previous releases.

FOR FANS OF: Tangerine Dream, Cluster, Neptune Towers

SPENCER GRADY

BUÑUEL
Killers Like Us
PROFOUND LORE/LA TEMPESA DISCHI

Oxbow frontman finds a new legion for his journey into delirium

Buñuel's musical three-fourths may be comprised of Italian maestros hopped up on cynicism, sarcasm and classic noise rock, but it's the imposing howl of Eugene S. Robinson that sets the quartet apart from their influences and contemporaries. Better known as Oxbow's onstage and in-studio rabble-rouser, Eugene keeps his well-tailored suit on as he sings for his supper over Big Black-inspired doomy power pop (*When God Used A Rope*, *Roll Call)* and wiry avant-garde din straight from the 80s Lower East Side (*It's All Mine*). Additionally, his bluesy, wayward bellow nestles in when guitarist Xabier Iriondo, bassist Andrea Lombardini and drummer Francesco Valente venture down the kaleidoscopic paths of *Stocklock* and *For The Cops*. Altogether, it makes *Killers Like Us* a coming together of voice and instrumentation that deserves to be heard.

FOR FANS OF: Oxbow, The Jesus Lizard, Big Business

CONNIE GORDON

Annihilator's Jeff Walker takes his medicine

ANNIHILATOR
Metal II
EARMUSIC

Canadian thrash veterans patch up their star-studded oddity

OF ALL THE albums Annihilator could follow up, why would they pick *Metal*? The 2007 collaboration project bisected a fanbase that was already dwindling, begging the thrashers to rediscover the fast-fingered dynamism of magnum opuses *Alice In Hell* and *Never, Neverland*. While one half was wowed by the album's 12 cameos, which included Willie Adler and Jeff Loomis, the other was deflated by the forgettable songwriting.

Then you realise *Metal II* isn't a sequel, despite its name explicitly stating such. Instead, it's a re-recording, replacing Dave Padden with ex-Iced Earth singer Stu Block, and Mike Mangini with drumming deity Dave Lombardo. All the guest spots we heard 15 years ago, though, remain untouched. So, takes tracked in 2006 are stitched onto the new trio's efforts, formulating a half-decayed Frankenstein's Monster of metal.

Metal II isn't without merit. It's gratifying to hear Stu escape Jon Schaffer's Capitol Building-shaped shadow, as *Chasing The High* crams his best Chuck Billy, Steve Souza and Rob Halford impressions side by side. During *Romeo Delight*, his jocular swagger joins Alexi Laiho's solo to avoid the homogenising of a Van Halen classic.

Dave, however, is wasted; his talents never get to steal the show as much as merely frame it. Plus, the songs are as bland now as ever. *Army Of One* idolises metal with the creativity of a Wikipedia list (*'Anthrax! Motörhead! Exodus! Slayer! Bang your head!'*), while the album's melodies couldn't be flatter if they were pummelled beneath an iron foundry press. This is especially true of *Couple Suicide*'s glam schmaltz, where Danko Jones and Angela Gossow's vocals have been mechanised and muddied by time.

Metal II is a wilfully deceptive swipe from one-time thrash idols – especially when the original's getting reissued soon. If terrible ideas weighed a gram, this would be heavier than the Eiffel Tower.

FOR FANS OF: Testament, Iced Earth, Exodus

MATT MILLS

KAI SWILLUS/PRESS

Bloodywood: guardians of alacrity

BLOODYWOOD

Rakshak

SELF-RELEASED

New Delhi's nu/electro-fuelled metallers unleash a baptism of fire

THREE YEARS AGO, when Bloodywood's cover of Bombay Rocker's *Ari Ari* went viral on Youtube, you could have been forgiven for thinking the New Delhi rap-metallers would have a limited shelf-life. Sure, it was a cracking blend of traditional Indian instruments with riffs, but without any original material or touring experience, there didn't appear to be any sort of outlook for them. How things change. After their own songs gained just as much traction online, they went on to sell out 80% of their first ever tour in the summer of 2019 and destroyed the Bullhead City Circus stage at Wacken that same year – no mean feat for a band who hadn't even recorded an album. But they have now, and *Rakshak*, which means 'guardian' in Hindi, continues the band's extraordinary rise to prominence.

The four original tracks released prior – *Machi Basad*, *Jee Veerey*, *Endurant* and *Yaad* – have all been re-recorded for the album, gaining an extra level of bite in the process thanks to the excellent production job from guitarist Karan Katiyar. But they all take a back seat next to the punch and zeal that the half-dozen new songs emit. Lead single and opening number *Gaddaar* might be the best track they've done to date, a raucous middle finger towards the far right of politics and humanity delivered with a snarl Rage Against The Machine would be proud of. The flute-led *Aaj* and Linkin Park-influenced *Zanjeero Se* show the band's impressive musical range whilst inherently staying true to their native roots, before *BDSK.exe* and *Chakh Le* deliver the most crushing of finales. If this is what Bloodywood can achieve on their own, imagine where they could go with a label behind them. Surely that's only a matter of time.

FOR FANS OF: Korn, Alien Weaponry, The Hu

ELLIOT LEAVER

BURNED IN EFFIGY

Rex Mortem

SELF-RELEASED

Death metal melody-makers start life at the back of the pack

These Canadians tout themselves as "progressive" melodic death metal, and while their debut has the fundamentals nailed, with the guitar noodling and the breakdowns in *Artorias* and *Hades*, there's nothing here that outshines any other melodeath band. The neoclassical playing isn't as infectious or innovative as Children Of Bodom's was, while the song structures cling fearfully to pop/rock conventions. Wonky time signatures throw in the odd curveball, such as during *Atlas*, but we've heard weirder and tighter angles from the likes of Edge Of Sanity. A competent foundation's been built here, but there's minimal personality as yet to distinguish Burned In Effigy in an over-saturated scene.

FOR FANS OF: Children Of Bodom, In Flames, Dark Tranquillity

MATT MILLS

CLOAKROOM

Dissolution Wave

RELAPSE

Indiana's conceptual shoegaze revivalists get lost in space

The shoegaze scene is in rude health, with a spate of new bands and reformed acts matching, if not arguably bettering the classic early 90s blueprint. Cloakroom's third full-length gets full marks for its imaginative concept – a space western where all of humanity's art has been eradicated by an act of theoretical physics – even if the execution isn't quite as (inter)stellar. *Fear Of Being Fixed* crawls with menacing momentum, like My Bloody Valentine covering Black Sabbath, and *Lambspring* juxtaposes doomy reveries with bright, jangly guitar lines, albeit at a leisurely stoner tempo. *Dissolution Wave* feels like a pleasant 38-minute diversion, but very little of it sticks with you once you wake from its warm embrace.

FOR FANS OF: Hum, Failure, Nothing

REMFRY DEDMAN

COBRA THE IMPALER

Colossal Gods

LISTENABLE

Belgian veterans unite for a show of melodic prog/death mastery

Cobra The Impaler are to metal what hammers are to anvils – just bloody smashing. The Belgian five-piece's prog-infused debut offers not just a non-stop pounding of blistering riffs, but is a jaw-dropping rollercoaster that keeps on surprising. Spearheaded by former Aborted guitarist Thijs de Cloedt, with Megadeth's Dirk Verbeuren at the kit, it's clear that they had a vision in mind that takes Mastodon's early raw heaviness and laces it with 00s melodeath, which they masterfully execute without sounding like a bloated mess. A satisfying debut that's got its shit together, *Colossal Gods* doesn't outstay its welcome, but those hooks will stay with you for a good long while.

FOR FANS OF: Mastodon, Shadows Fall, High On Fire

HYWEL DAVIES

PRESS

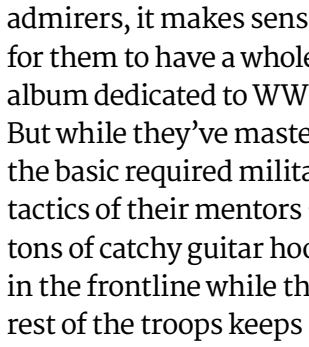
CREEPING FLESH
...And Then The Bombs Came
EMANZIPATION PRODUCTIONS

Swedish warmongers remain overly loyal to their masters

War: men inventing more and more powerful and destructive weapons just to use to obliterate their foes. What's not to like for a death metal band? Considering how this Gothenburg-based posse don't actually sound particularly Swedish while openly admitting to being huge Bolt Thrower admirers, it makes sense for them to have a whole album dedicated to WWII. But while they've mastered the basic required military tactics of their mentors – tons of catchy guitar hooks in the frontline while the rest of the troops keeps rumbling in the background with supra-heavy mid-tempos – they never dare to overrun them. In the end, they come across as an efficient substitute yet fail to beat their fellow Swedish warmongers Just Before Dawn at their game.

FOR FANS OF: Bolt Thrower, Hail Of Bullets, Just Before Dawn

OLIVIER BADIN



DAGOBA
By Night
NAPALM

Gallic groove metallers tentatively enter the digital age

On paper, the eighth album from French groove metallers Dagoba sounds promising. The band are known for their impressive riffs, and this record is no different with plenty of melodies and breakdowns. However, this is their third consecutive release with a new label, and it's tempting to wonder if that's beginning to impact the group. Despite a couple of moments on *Sunfall* and *On The Run*, little of *By Night* stays long in the mind. Additionally, the added electronics – which should have given a strong industrial edge – aren't prominent enough in the mix to make the desired impact. There's no question that Dagoba are a solid outfit, but with the career they've carved out thus far, you'd expect a lot more.

FOR FANS OF: Killswitch Engage, Five Finger Death Punch, Lamb Of God

ELLIOT LEAVER

DAWN OF SOLACE
Flames Of Perdition
NOBLE DEMON

Mournful Finnish metallers put too much sweetness into their sorrow

In 2020, Tuomas Saukkonen resurrected Dawn Of Solace after 14 years with their melancholic sophomore effort, *Waves*. On *Flames Of Perdition* the otherwise prolific Finnish metaller (Wolfheart, Before The Dawn), resumes the probing gloom of *Waves* with a fresh collection of polished, mournful ballads that offer the ideal soundtrack to isolating in a remote cabin and contemplating a lifetime of regret. Spare acoustic guitars build into grinding walls of distortion beneath Mikko Heikkilä's clean, doleful vocals. The vibe is more Nightwish than Wolfheart, delivering all of the melo with little of the death. Passages rise and ebb to dramatic effect and the production is both crisp and potent, but by the final track, you'd be hard-pressed to recall a singular standout melody. Though not without some genuinely stirring moments, *Flames Of Perdition* suffers from a frustrating lack of variety.

FOR FANS OF: Swallow The Sun, Katatonia, Ghost Brigade

JOE DALY

EIGHT BELLS
Legacy Of Ruin
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Avant-doom elegies to a world on the brink of oblivion

Portland avant-garde doom trio Eight Bells return with third album *Legacy Of Ruin*, a "swansong to a dying planet" that melds a 70s doom aura with more modern metallic tropes. The result is frequently spellbinding, the harmonised vocals of founding member/guitarist Melynda Jackson and ex-Cormorant bassist Matt Solis elevating the band's sound. On robust opener *Destroyer*, Jackson plays the harbinger beset by Solis's despairing howls amidst musical tumult, the percussive blasting and undulating doom rhythms providing a robust introduction. The haunting repose of *The Well* follows, with Matt and Melynda melding in harmonic unison. It's Fleetwood Mac-esque, especially in the gentle minimalism of *The Crone*, before it erupts in blackened fury. With more finesse than 2016's *Landless*, Eight Bells channel the best of psychedelic extremity through the ages to craft a captivating, cataclysmic trip.

FOR FANS OF: Khemmis, Vouna, Enslaved

TOM O'BOYLE

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

ABYSMAL DAWN
Nightmare Frontier
SEASON OF MIST

Three blistering bursts of the most razor-sharp tech-death imaginable and a magnificent cover of Candlemass's immortal *Bewitched* (Charles Elliott can sing!). Another fine reason to worship Abysmal Dawn like gods.

DOM LAWSON

ANGELBLAST
Throne Of Ashes
EDGED CIRCLE

Peddling some of the most demonically charged death metal since Possessed's *Seven Churches*, Angelblast lay on the atmospherics with devilish glee, making a delightful racket that'll have you scaring the local church in no time.

RICH HOBSON

COLLECTED
Say When
SELF-RELEASED

There's a lot going on within the debut EP from this young Essex outfit – there are prog-metal, breakdowns and even synth passages at times – but it's brilliantly woven together and brims with potential.

ELLIOT LEAVER

MARIANGELA DEMURTAS
Dark Ability
SELF-RELEASED

On this four-track EP, the Tristania vocalist builds on her band's sumptuous, piano-led atmospherics. Albeit airier in places than some might expect, at its most potent, it succeeds in casting long shadows.

DANNII LEIVERS

EL MOONO
Temple Corrupted
LOCKJAW

This Brighton four-piece have managed to take Mike Patton's vocal madness, Neurosis's pitch-black bottom end and Every Time I Die's rhythmic lunacy and make it sound... well, every bit as good as that description sounds.

STEPHEN HILL

GRAPHIC NATURE
New Skin EP
RISE

This collection of nu metal anthems is flavoured with Slipknot-inspired breakbeats and scratchy, static noise. Each chorus hits like a wall of death at an illegal rave. An energising debut from fresh new blood.

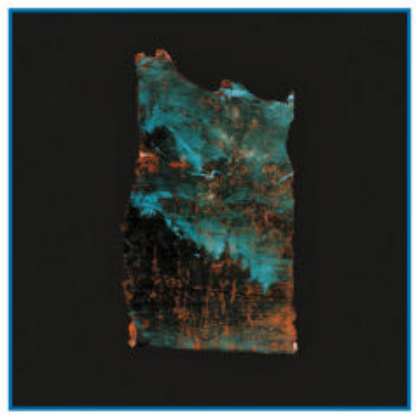
ROSIE SOLOMON

Cult Of Luna step up to the plate once more

CULT OF LUNA
The Long Road North
METAL BLADE

Umeå's post-metal voyagers keep seeking out the scenic routes

CULT OF LUNA have frequently presented listeners with a sense of physical space, often coupled with a sense of *journey*. This applies to both the music they make – long, winding compositions that are as much about the scenery as the destination – and the concepts behind it. After exploring Fritz Lang's stark *Metropolis* and journeying into outer space with Julie Christmas the band have, in recent years, seemingly hunkered down and returned to earth, leaving behind the familiar post-metal grid for wilder climes where the pathways are treacherously overgrown.



The Long Road North continues this same trajectory, and the rugged life suits them. Opening with a seismic groan, *Cold Burn* serves as a furious statement of intent: a mix of shimmering guitars, glowering drones and propulsive drumming that brings to mind a krautrock Neurosis. Elsewhere, *The Silver Arc* sees its vast, rumbling riffs connected by a delicate latticework of subtler elements, while *An Offering To The Wild* begins with a solemn, near-ritual traipse before raising itself up into an ungodly pillar of flame. Similarly savage is the album's title track, which makes you feel as though you've been caught in a meteor shower with just a cocktail umbrella for protection, its tumultuous climax among the band's most skull-splittingly intense moments.

As longtime fans might expect, however, this ingenious brutality is far from the be-all and end-all, and it's in the stranger, more liminal moments where the band show the greatest growth. Mariam Wallentin's aching rasp adds incredible depth to the brief *Beyond I*, while composer/multi-instrumentalist Colin Stetson helps close the album on a note that's both hopeful and terrifying. This willingness to explore and experiment ensures *The Long Road North* is both cerebral and exhilaratingly heavy, and should leave us all hoping that the band's arduous, eventful journey has no end in sight.

FOR FANS OF: Amenra, US Christmas, Neurosis

ALEX DELLER

FETAL BLOOD EAGLE
Indoctrinate
LISTENABLE

Aborted frontman forges a gross-out, transatlantic alliance

Fetal Blood Eagle may posture about brutality like pre-teens who have just discovered *Tombs Of The Mutliated*, but by god if they don't give it a good go. Featuring members of Necronomichrist and Aborted (among others), there is an inevitable chimerical assembly to their sound. However, they make it work in their favour, applying a sensory overload of nastiness that keeps them aloft long after your eyes have rolled back into your skull at titles like *Hate Fucked Face* and *Abortion Dumpster Overload*. Such puerility does the band a disservice, as beneath the grime you'll find plenty to gnash your teeth about, FBE plying tricks and tropes with just enough love that you'll almost forget you've heard it all before.

FOR FANS OF: Aborted, Immolation, Parem-Nesia

RICH HOBSON

GRIVO
Omit
CHURCH ROAD

Austin post-rock/shoegaze trio fail to turn up the contrast

Omit is meant to be a collision between fuzzy, dissonant shoegaze and lingering, post-rock atmospherics. The biggest highlight is *Languor* – a seven-minute soother that dances along with calmingly clean guitar chords and breathy vocals. When Grivo try to be noisy, though, the result isn't a counter-balancing explosion of vigour. The guitar tones grow heavier, yet the singing and drums refuse to budge, knee-capping any potential diversity. The result is that *Omit* is neither consistently relaxing enough to hypnotise, nor dynamic enough to keep you guessing for 45 minutes. There's promise here, but Grivo are currently only halfway there.

FOR FANS OF: Slowdive, Nothing, Mogwai

MATT MILLS

HANGMAN'S CHAIR
A Loner
NUCLEAR BLAST

Atmospheric Gauls blur magnificence and monotony

A big heave up the ladder for this stoner/sludge French quartet, on their sixth album and Nuclear Blast debut. The sound and outlook has broadened a lot over the years; Hangman's Chair are increasingly emboldened to explore more nuanced, atmospheric textures with their hearts on their sleeves, audibly lovestruck by the stylistic innovations of *October Rust*-era Type O Negative. Their grooves can still be satisfyingly blunt, but the soundscape is permanently awash with effects-laden reverb, as cold, clean-picked notes rise and fall out of billowing fuzz pedal radiance. It's good stuff, but you might find the brooding tempos, echoey guitar twangs and reedy crooning start blurring into monotony.

FOR FANS OF: Type O Negative, Alice In Chains, The Cure

CHRIS CHANTLER

PRESS

IMMOLATION
Acts Of God
NUCLEAR BLAST

New York's legends of churning death assert their supremacy

Oft imitated but seldom equalled, Immolation have amassed what must surely be the most impressive and consistent catalogue in death metal history. As a result, the monstrous brilliance of their 11th full-length is less surprising than it probably should be. Without messing with their own peerless formula, *Acts Of God* builds on the scabrous grandeur of the New Yorkers' last few records and sounds sharper and more meticulously crafted than any Immolation record since the immortal *Close To A World Below*. Born aloft on thick waves of churning dread, songs like *Blooded*, and *Overtures Of The Wicked* reaffirm the uniqueness of the band's ageless sound. Equal parts muscular ferocity and otherworldly squall, every last moment of *Acts Of God* noisily proclaims this band's unerring superiority. It's so good, it almost seems unfair. Immolation are unfuckwithable right now.

FOR FANS OF: Ulcerate, Grave Miasma, Tomb Mold

DOM LAWSON

IN HEARTS WAKE
Kaliyuga Booster Pack
UNFD

Australian metalcore pack get the juices flowing once more

Keeping the good riffs coming, Australian five-piece In Hearts Wake continue in ravenous form after releasing their fifth studio album, *Kaliyuga*, last year, by dropping this accompanying extended EP. It features three brand new tracks, including the slamtastic *Dogma*, that sees the Aussies team up with Alpha Wolf in an alliance that smashes harder than an asteroid to the face. Additionally, they've also managed to capture five tracks from their only show of 2021 in Brisbane on what would've been the start of *Kaliyuga*'s tour cycle. No doubt this will get fans Down Under excited for their rescheduled dates commencing in early 2022. This EP packs enough punch that leaves you wanting more while setting a strong precedent for the year ahead.

FOR FANS OF: Parkway Drive, Northlane, While She Sleeps

HYWEL DAVIES

INSOLVENCY
Illusional Gates
SELF-RELEASED

Instant gratification from a band wary of instant gratification

This French quartet's sophomore album presents an analysis of "a society addicted to technology and instant gratification" over a bed of anthemic modern metalcore. Insolvency win no points for originality, then, but they do display an impressive knack for fluid guitar lines that recall early Thrice and gang vocals that echo While She Sleeps. There are some interesting, synthesised ideas scattered throughout, *Last Call* and the title track in particular, but all too often, Insolvency fall back on a foundational metalcore sound that robs them of any intrinsic identity. Guest spots from Fit For A King's Ryan Kirby and Thy Art Is Murder's CJ McMahon simply emphasise their lack of individuality. But if Insolvency expand further on their more unorthodox ideas in future, we could be looking at a great new metalcore band rather than simply a good one.

FOR FANS OF: While She Sleeps, Underoath, Vangelis

REMFRY DEDMAN

INVISIONS
Deadlock
SELF-RELEASED

Yorkshire metalcore mob get personal on their third album

Formed in 2016, this Yorkshire metalcore mob have clearly found their groove. For the most part, *Deadlock* is similar to their previous two albums, but they've dialled back the breakdowns a touch and sharpened their songwriting. *Annihilist* was a smart choice of single, given its engaging electronic influences and catchy chorus, but it is more accessible than other tracks on here. There are a generous number of angrier and more layered tracks, including the memorable vocal sections and fierce fretwork in *Half Life*, the menacing album opener *The 6 9 9*, the snarling and haunting *D E A L E R* and the craftily hooky *Hindsight*. Lead vocalist Ben Ville is on top form throughout and the band's mesh of brutality with melodic undertones is getting stronger. More personal, powerful, and writhing, Invisions have aimed and hit high.

FOR FANS OF: Attila, Periphery, Our Hollow Our Home

NIK YOUNG

Hammerall prepare to take on 'Cobra' Kai Hansen

HAMMERFALL
Hammer Of Dawn
NAPALM

Sweden's chief servants of steel keep it glorious

HAVING ALMOST SINGLE-HANDEDLY kickstarted a late-90s European power metal movement that continues to flourish today, Hammerfall should be more frequently and more loudly celebrated than they often are, particularly in the UK. Younger, flashier bands have arguably leapfrogged the Swedes and taken their old-school majesty to greater commercial heights, which may be why *Hammer Of Dawn* sounds like the work of a fired-up, united front with a point to prove. Not that there was much wrong with 2019's *Dominion*, a self-evident return to top form, but Hammerfall's 12th full-length feels bigger, bolder and more bombastic, and is also blessed with some of the best songs the band have written in years.

Both the opening *Brotherhood* and the title track that follows are perfect encapsulations of Hammerfall's subtly distinctive sound. The former is a straight-ahead eruption of hands-in-the-air, metal-as-fuck euphoria; the latter is opulent and dramatic, with slick, theatrical dynamics and the ragged, night-sky grandeur of a Viking burial ceremony. Elsewhere, *Reveries* is a slow-burning march through ominous shadows with an irresistible, wordless refrain; *Live Free Or Die* is a balls-out, old-school rampage that would have slotted in nicely on Hammerfall's seminal debut, *Glory To The Brave*; *Not Today* is a bruised and brooding power ballad, with frontman Joacim Cans delivering one of the performances of his career.

Exhibiting a sense of urgency that belies their veteran status, Hammerfall sound newly engaged and up for the fight here. Gleefully pompous and pointedly uplifting, songs like the closing *No Mercy* aren't merely the work of a bunch of battle-worn diehards. They also showcase the sound of an inveterate class act, whose collective love for heavy metal in its purest form has, it seems, grown ever stronger in recent times.

FOR FANS OF: Sabaton, Powerwolf, Warkings

DOM LAWSON

SANDRA MYHRBERG/CAMERA LUCIDA/PRESS

Rolo Tomassi: still looking to the future

ROLO TOMASSI

Where Myth Becomes Memory

MNRK

Sheffield's multi-disciplinary noisemakers fire up their fusion drive

ROLO TOMASSI'S EVOLUTIONARY journey has been a pleasure to behold. Over the course of their kaleidoscopic career, the Sheffield quartet have pivoted from teenage mathcore anarchists, who announced themselves with the demented, precocious 2008 debut, *Hysterics*, to genre-bending masters of tone, texture and colour. Honing their own take on post-hardcore with every release, they always stayed one step ahead of an ever-decreasing pool of peers.

After 2015's *Grievances* and 2018's *Time Will Die And Love Will Bury It*, which saw them magnify the dynamic interplay between light and shade, their sixth album feels like another natural progression. While *Drip*, with its exhilarating, tension-and-release build-up, and *Mutual Ruin* go for the jugular, ethereal opener *Almost Always* and ballad *Closer* display the band's most confident use of atmosphere and space yet. The former builds to a trembling wall of dense, twinkling shoegaze before the latter, a barely there piano ballad, explodes into the kind of shimmering, instrumental firework display worthy of post rock luminaries Maybeshewill or This Will Destroy You.

While in the early days, Tomassi's disorientating racket was powered by chaos, stitching together jazz, prog and classical influences with chunky, jagged threads, the fluidity between the various elements of their sound now feels natural and unforced. Towering single *Cloaked* is the most metal the band have ever sounded, with a darkly epic riff that bends around frenetic and celestial vocals from Eva Korman. *Labyrinthine* zig-zags between nightmarish tones and blissful relief, while closer *The End Of Eternity* is a black-gaze track woven tightly into a bright-eyed, post-rock dreamscape. *Where Myth Becomes Memory* feels like Rolo Tomassi have finally perfected the their sound, but for a band dedicated to perpetual motion, it's unlikely this spells the end of their progression.

FOR FANS OF: The Dillinger Escape Plan, The Mars Volta, Converge

DANNII LEIVERS

KUROKUMA

Born Of Obsidian

SELF-RELEASED

Myth- and blood-soaked adventures from the feral north

The much-anticipated debut album from this near decade-old band of Sheffield-bred subgenre-straddlers is an inventive, electrifying and absolutely unforgettable listen. Inspired by the blood-soaked myths and history of ancient Mesoamerican civilisations, Kurokuma – 'black bear' in Japanese – are aptly named as they're nothing short of ferocious. Over five mammoth, thematically linked tracks the trio take you on a journey as they push at the boundaries of sludge and doom. Employing unusual percussion instruments and taking influence from post-rock and hypnotic electronic music, tracks like the cowbell-bashing, near-nine-minute epic *Jaguar* pack plenty of bite.

FOR FANS OF: Sepultura, Chubby Thunderous Bad Kush Masters, Slomatics

EDWIN McFEE

MOUNTAINEER

Giving Up The Ghost

LIFEFORCE

Sunshine State post-rock that leaves you a little cold

The fourth album from this Californian sextet offers sun-kissed melancholy steeped in the DNA of their native Sunshine State. Even at their most dour, Mountaineer's post-rock soundscapes offer reassuring warmth. Going through a major line-up change after 2018's *Passages* album makes *Giving Up The Ghost* the 'second' release of their current incarnation, after 2020's somewhat passive *Bloodletting*. First track proper *Blot Out The Sun* is the most structurally adventurous, meandering from huge, sonorous riffs and uplifting, harmonised vocals over twinkling leads, which build to a skittering, epic close. With following tracks offering variations on the theme, it's the sound of a band finding their voice. A nice place to visit, but ultimately forgettable.

FOR FANS OF: Explosions In The Sky, Palms, SOM

TOM O'BOYLE

MYSTIC CIRCLE

Mystic Circle

ATOMIC FIRE

German black metallers return with the full deck of cheese

In the early 00s, Mystic Circle were one of Europe's most disparaged black metal bands, puffed full of clichés yet remaining a mainstay on the touring circuit thanks to their partnership with one of the mainland's most influential booking agencies. Sixteen years after their initial split, the reunion of its two founding members isn't as painful as expected. Yes, it still has that 'cheesy black metal pack for beginners' vibe, as if Dimmu Borgir were still cutting edge, and cringe-inducing lyrics. But at least they've included a Danny Elfman-esque cinematic vibe and learnt to master their instruments. But in a world now run by Mgła and Funeral Mist, Mystic Circle remain an anachronism.

FOR FANS OF: Cradle Of Filth, Dark Funeral, Dimmu Borgir

OLIVIER BADIN

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

PURE WRATH

Hymn To The Woeful Hearts

DEBEMUR MORTI PRODUCTIONS

Indonesian multi-instrumentalist Januaryo Hardy draws inspiration from his country's bloody past, fuelling breakneck, yet profusely melodic, black metal with folk-indebted interludes.

SPENCER GRADY

MASAKRE

Morbid Extinction

PULVERISED

Just like the similarly named Swedish band, these Indonesian renegades approach DM from the crust angle. Their outbursts of nuclear-charged d-beat bear short-term yet maximum effects.

OLIVIER BADIN

MUD SPENCER

Fuzz Soup

ARGONAUTA

Informed by 60s garage and surf rock, 70s psych and Deep Purple in their pomp, the fuzz-fuelled, bedroom-recorded debut album from this Indonesian one-man band is a fun but sometimes flabby affair.

EDWIN McFEE

ANDT FORD/PRESS

NAPALM DEATH
Resentment Is Always Seismic - A Final Throw Of Throes
CENTURY MEDIA

Grindcore royalty's offcuts make for a fine main course

Described as a mini-LP despite being the same length as their seminal first two albums, these leftovers from 2020's *Throes Of Joy In The Jaws Of Defeatism* are another outlandish reminder of the Brummie legends' consistency. Opener *Narcissus* is modern Napalm at their most propulsive and vital. Covers of Bad Brains' *Don't Need It* and Slab!'s *People Pie* sound both more unhinged and oppressive respectively, the latter's industrial groove a refreshingly catchy avenue for a band who have never rested on their laurels. Indeed, it's the more experimental tracks that prove the most thrilling. The debilitating dirge of *Resentment Always Simmers*, later remixed under bassist Shane Embury's Dark Sky Burial moniker, makes matters even more uncomfortable with its electronic sprinkling and fierce soundscapes.

FOR FANS OF: Nasum, Swans, Coil

ADAM REES

NEAR DEATH CONDITION
Ascent From The Mundane
UNIQUE LEADER

Twisted Swiss death crew deal out savagery from the swamps

While proudly flying the flag for death metal's ancient, arcane codes of conduct, Near Death Condition have been quietly mutating during the eight years since their last album. Although more succinct than 2014's *Evolving Towards Extinction*, the Swiss band's fourth full-length is a deeper, darker dive into opaque, swirling depths than its predecessors. The opening sprawl of *Witness To The Martyr* sets the tone; this is wild and ferocious death metal with one foot planted in a swamp of amorphous discord, and the other in more traditionally brutal territory. The subsequent hybrid certainly nods towards the classic complexity of Morbid Angel and Immolation, but songs like *The Bridal Chamber* and *Astral Journey* rarely do the expected. Instead, Near Death Condition's intuitive perversity ensures that *Ascent From The Mundane* is a grim and gripping descent into the unknown.

FOR FANS OF: Immolation, Artificial Brain, Aeon

DOM LAWSON

NORNA
Star Is Way, Way Is Eye
VINTER

Ex-Breach frontman carries too much weight on his spiritual path

Featuring former Breach vocalist Tomas Liljedahl, Norna's debut album is spiritual, bleak and utterly crushing. Marrying the grimy tones of sludge with the glacial might of post-metal, *Star...* is an exercise in seeking a higher understanding of being through sonic obliteration. It's mostly well-executed and put together. Opener *The Truther* begins with a sludgy dirge, setting the tone for the remainder of the record in its morose atmosphere. It's a strong start, and the melodic leads plus midpoint in *Tabula Rasa* are a particular highlight. Unfortunately, *Serpent Spine* repeats itself a little too much and drags on as it progresses. There's not quite enough sonic variety across the album to retain interest as the band opt solely for sonic heft and its emotional palette offers little variety.

FOR FANS OF: Amenra, Cult Of Luna, Eyehategod

WILL MARSHALL

ONCE HUMAN
Scar Weaver
EARMUSIC

Logan Mader and Lauren Hart renew their melodic death vows

It's been five years since we've heard from Once Human – the brainchild of former Machine Head/Soulfly guitarist Logan Mader and vocalist Lauren Hart – on the album front. By their own admittance, the first few years were driven by passion and a desire to lay down foundations, but now, with a full team around them, they can concentrate fully on the music. Third effort *Scar Weaver* is a smorgasbord of melodic death metal thrills. It's also easily the band's strongest work to date and, if the chunky riffs and bounce in *Deadlock* – featuring Robb Flynn – don't stir something within you, then the groove-laden double salvo of *Erasure* and *Deserted* certainly will. It must be said that there isn't much here that's particularly ground-breaking, but *Scar Weaver* is undoubtedly a whole load of fun from beginning to end all the same.

FOR FANS OF: Arch Enemy, Fear Factory, Scar Symmetry

ELLIOT LEAVER

Saxon refuse to pine for the old days

SAXON
Carpe Diem
SILVER LINING MUSIC

Brit metal titans grab 2022 by the knackers

IF THE LAST couple of years have achieved anything, it's to have reintroduced many of us to the joy of simple pleasures. As ever, that's where Saxon come in. A reassuring and reliable presence in heavy music for over four decades, Biff Byford's tireless crew would be an easy band to take for granted, were it not for their eerie ability to keep making great records like this, their 22nd studio album – or 23rd, if you include last year's enjoyable, shambolic covers set, *Inspirations*.

Not every recent Saxon album has scaled the heights of revered early classics like *Wheels Of Steel* and *Denim And Leather*, but *Carpe Diem* is plainly a keeper from the opening seconds of its thunderous title track. Admittedly, one might question the efficacy of seizing the day when people are still spit-spraying malevolent microbes at each other, but it's a sentiment that suits Saxon perfectly, and it's a typically bolshy slab of hard-driving melodic metal, replete with a gloriously punchy Biff vocal.

Thereafter, this is simply a textbook Saxon album: great songs, giant choruses, gritty musicianship and absolutely no fucking about. There are fast, furious, swashbuckling anthems like *Age Of Steam* (not a direct sequel to *Princess Of The Night*, perhaps, but close enough), *Dambusters* and *Super Nova*; there are grandiose, prog-tinged mini-epics like *Lady In Gray* and *The Pilgrimage*; *Black Is The Night* is as gnarly and evil-sounding as anything Saxon have ever recorded and then there is the closing *Living On The Limit*, an unusually snotty, sub-three-minute speed metal knees-up that sounds custom-designed to cause havoc at live shows.

Naysayers will continue to say nay, but Saxon have survived for more than 40 years because they are, as *Carpe Diem* proves again, really fucking good at this shit.

FOR FANS OF: Accept, Judas Priest, Doro

DOM LAWSON

PRESS

Slash and co got a fresh perspective in Nashville

SLASH FEAT. MYLES KENNEDY AND THE CONSPIRATORS

4

GIBSON

Celebrated kindred rock spirits loosen up in Nashville

TEN YEARS ON from their debut, *Apocalyptic Love*, this high-end alliance of talent has forged an instantly recognisable brand of arena rock that, while at times predictable, has nonetheless evolved in subtle yet compelling ways. On *4* they play to their heaviest strengths, and with some very noticeable – and welcome – modifications.

For their latest, the band decamped to Nashville to record with producer Dave Cobb, who has produced some of country music's biggest names. At Dave's urging, the band recorded everything live, injecting the tracks with the freewheeling spontaneity of a gig. You can hear the payoff immediately on opener *The River Is Rising*, with its loose, punchy swagger and a blazing double-time breakdown that will cause more than a few spikes on the adrenaline meter.

At first blush, *4* feels back-loaded. After pushing through a gauntlet of mid-tempo rockers, *Fill My World* bursts through with a flourish of jangly pop hooks and an unapologetically earnest, anthemic chorus. The one-two bludgeoning of *April Fool* and *Call Off The Dogs* serve up all of the wind-whipping tempos and fist-in-the-air guitar heroics that you'd expect from Slash. The concluding *Fall Back To Earth* is a bluesy, reverb-drenched epic that builds to a feverish climax featuring one of the iconic guitarist's most memorable solos and a cinematic, lighter-waving outro reminiscent of *Hotel California*.

Additional spins of the first half's less immediate fare like *Actions Speak Louder Than Words*, *Spirit Love* and *C'est La Vie* reveal a trove of silvery melodies, insta-hummable verses and more piledriver grooves than one album should reasonably contain. *Whatever Gets You By* is the only track that fails to stick, but that simply speaks to the high quality of the songwriting elsewhere. *4* is an overwhelmingly strong and mature effort that sets the bar high for mainstream rock in 2022.

FOR FANS OF: Black Label Society, Danko Jones, Alice In Chains

JOE DALY

PERSEFONE

Metanoia

NAPALM

Andorran progressive death sextet realise their ambition

In 2020, these progressive death metallers re-recorded their 2004 debut, *Truth Inside The Shades*, with a brutal lack of sentiment, dragging it up to a level worthy of their grand-scale ambitions. It reflected an approach that's seen the band perfect a dense, opulent sound dealing in hi-concept wizardry, orchestral flourishes and blunt-force brutality with *Metanoia*. Wild and spontaneous, yet clinically precise, the drama of the furious *Katabasis* is only outdone by three-part mini epic *Anabasis (Pt 1, 2 and 3)* which runs a cinematic gamut taking in dramatic electronica and a jazz-inflected onslaught before ending with a slow-burning dreamscape. *Metanoia* is Persefone's most accomplished album so far.

FOR FANS OF: The Black Dahlia Murder, Black Crown Initiate, Ne Obliviscaris

DANNII LEIVERS

MATT PIKE

Pike Vs The Automaton

MNRK HEAVY

Stoner rock overlord unleashes a personal response to the wreckage

The debut solo album from leather-lunged, Grammy-winning fret-wizard Matt Pike was born from a simple need to turn the amps up to 11 and blow the roof off his garage. Described as a musical and emotional release for the Sleep and High On Fire man, the opus was recorded while political riots raged and wildfires ravaged a locked-down America. It's not just a frustrated scream into the abyss, but also a two-fingered salute to the pandemic era. The acoustic, country-flavoured curveball *Land* features a solo from Mastodon's Brent Hinds, while the Motörhead-minded *Abusive* and hardcore punk stomper *Acid Test Zone* prove that Pike is still as sharp as ever.

FOR FANS OF: High On Fire, Sleep, Motörhead

EDWIN MCFEE

SCHEMATA THEORY

Unity In Time

SELF-RELEASED

UK post-hardcore crew weigh in on the need for connection

This Reading post-hardcore quintet's second full-length opens with a powerful instrumental before crashing into *Voices*. This first single was a fantastic choice, with its soaring, emotive vocals and heartfelt guitar solo. *Horror Show* tips a hat to Killswitch Engage, *Vantage Point* and *Pain Unknown* experiment with atmospheric audio samples and spoken word, and *Mirrors* has particularly intoxicating fretwork and urgent vocals. The combination of dirty and clean duelling vocalists is at the heart of this band's sound. But the harsher lead is more versatile and the tracks that favour screamo and heavier riffs prove the most rewarding, doing best justice to the passionate lyrics centred around the concept of connection.

FOR FANS OF: Atreyu, Enter Shikari, Funeral For A Friend

NIK YOUNG

PRESS

SCHIZOPHRENIA
Recollections Of The Insane
SELF-RELEASED

Belgian death/thrash debutants form a new covenant

Despite being one of at least seven bands with the same name and paying homage to the 80s Florida scene, Belgium's Schizophrenia don't lack originality or character. Embedding a foundation of thrash alongside the pilfering of Trey Azagthoth's unmistakable tone and style, *Monolith*'s riffs sound suitably monumental next to the pacy *Inside The Walls Of Madness*. Guitarists Marty Van Kerckhoven and Romeo Promos Promopoulos seem determined to cram every idea and inspiration into *Cranial Disintegration*'s turmoil, while producer Francesco Paoli of Fleshgod Apocalypse adds his penchant for ostentation with *Sea Of Sorrow*'s eerie atmospheric wall. While it often feels like a kaleidoscopic maelstrom, *Recollections Of The Insane*'s zeal is matched by a well-honed proficiency that produces genuinely thrilling results.

FOR FANS OF: Morbid Angel, Death, Sepultura

ADAM REES

SHAPE OF DESPAIR
Return To The Void
SEASON OF MIST

Doom's funeral masters raise their gloomy game

There was always something magical about Shape Of Despair: the funeral doom band to end them all. *Return To The Void* arrives seven years after the spellbinding majesty of *Monotony Fields* – an album rightly heralded as a classic. The essence of the band's sound remains here, but somehow this seems an even heavier, darker and more unremittingly bleak affair. As ever, these are slow-motion avalanches of somnambulant desperation, with guitar tones that throb and surge like some foul Lovecraftian presence, amid an all-encompassing fog of shimmering dark ambience. Beautiful and brutal in equal measure, epics *Solitary Downfall* and *The Inner Desolation* demand total surrender, as Natalie Koskinen's ethereal vocals float up from the glacial melee, like the spiralling smoke-wisps of hope extinguished. Still magical, still undeniable: SOD will break us all in the end.

FOR FANS OF: Skepticism, Swallow The Sun, Ataraxie

DOM LAWSON

SILENT SKIES
Nectar
NAPALM

Sumptuous, prog-bient sorrow from Evergrey frontman

As frontman with Gothenburg prog metal veterans Evergrey, Tom S. Englund has made a habit of reducing listeners to blubbering heaps, while also creating some of the heaviest melodic metal of the last 25 years. With Silent Skies, his collaboration with multi-instrumentalist Vikram Shankar, Tom's voice is still centre stage, but the backdrop is bereft of riffs and firmly in quasi-classical/ambient territory. As with 2020's *Satellites* debut, *Nectar* is rich with treacly reverbs, dreampop haze and gentle echoes of contemporary composers like Nils Frahm and Ólafur Arnalds, ghostly electronics included. But it's Englund's voice, and the sweet simplicity of these profoundly melancholy songs, that make this such an emotionally satisfying piece of work. The best of them – epic opener *Fallen From Heart*; the surging, symphonic *Leaving* – won't so much tug at your heartstrings as tearfully strangle you with them.

FOR FANS OF: Evergrey, Anathema, Nils Frahm

DOM LAWSON

SILHOUETTE
Les Retranchements
ANTIQ

Gothic-tinged black metallers weave an introspective spell

Starting as a solo project in 2019, France's Silhouette expanded their ranks and concept into an elaborate atmospheric black metal quintet. Vocalists Ondine and Yarnham combine harsh, depressive BM male vocals with clean female operatics within dreamlike, gothic environs. *La Première Neige* has a fairytale quality, its abruptly explosive moments of BM curtailing introspective melodic passages as creative mastermind Achlys rakes through his past. In the slow-burn melodic dirge of the likes of *Au Seuil de l'Oubli* the record doesn't always engage, jolted back to life periodically by blackened freneticism. Closing with the epic, aggression-upping *L'Etreinte de la Chute*, and an elegant outro, this is melancholic melodrama for lovers of black metal's theatrical flair.

FOR FANS OF: Voices, Alcest, Oathbreaker

TOM O'BOYLE

Venom Prison: still pushing boundaries, still incandescent

VENOM PRISON
Erebos
CENTURY MEDIA

British extreme metal heroes soar to new heights

WHEN VENOM PRISON released *Primeval* in 2020 they were effectively running a victory lap, re-recording their first demo and EP as a means to show just how far they had come as a band. *Erebos* shows the band were also drawing a line under the past, trading in the chaotic scrappiness of youth to mete out more measured doses of aural punishment.

Put simply, *Erebos* is to *Samsara* what *Heartwork* was to *Reek Of Putrefecation*: the moment a great hope of the British extreme metal underground realised their potential and truly became a world-beating act. Venom Prison haven't turned their back on death metal – *Judges Of The Underworld* should put paid to any of that guff – but rather they have found ways of achieving maximum devastation within the sonic realms that we have come to know and love whilst expanding their repertoire.

With *Erebos*, producer Scott Atkins fully realises each of the disparate elements that make Venom Prison so formidable whilst ensuring the overall effect isn't buried beneath a cacophony. The result is some of the band's most anthemic and stirring moments to date. From the snarled *'Guilty as charged'* that serves as chorus and mosh-call alike on *Judges Of The Underworld* to the soaring guitars of *Comfort Of Complicity* and Svalbard-esque crashing melodies of *Pain Of Oizys*, Venom Prison maximise the sheer scope of their sound across these 10 tracks.

In 2015, Larissa Stupar and Ash Gray took a leap of faith, moving from Germany to Wales in pursuit of a band that could afford them a bright new future. Seven years later they take the plunge again, this time buoyed by a reputation as one of Britain's brightest new extreme metal acts. With *Erebos*, Venom Prison now have fully realised their potential, and there is no plateau too high for them.

FOR FANS OF: Carcass, Arch Enemy, Employed To Serve

RICH HOBSON

ANDY FORD/PRESS

Voivod: still exploring fantastic new worlds

VOIVOD
Synchro Anarchy
CENTURY MEDIA

Canada's thrash-warping pioneers administer a new set of future shocks

SIMILAR TO SPACE'S limitless expanse, there appears to be no stopping the sci-fi-worshipping, Canadian eco-warriors of ice as they continue to venture deep into the post-Denis 'Piggy' D'Amour era. For this we can thank Daniel 'Chewy' Mongrain. He's one of the few axe-slingers not only able to reproduce the late guitarist's oblong-shaped, oddball prog thrash renderings, but to also comfortably exist as the creative thrust for new material, marrying their old-school, warhead-tipped din with boomer-age proggy reminiscing while still pushing further and forward. For the third time since 2008, he's again made possible what was once unimaginable.

Album number 15 is a quirky, loping and almost insidious paean to tribal rhythms, minor-key dissonance re-jigged into experimental punk rock with stream of consciousness poetry riding a jet-stream towards a black hole. Occasionally, though, the immediacy of the skittish, pockmarked thrash of the stellar *Memory Failure* is challenged by dense, counter-productive moments like *Paranormalium*, which gets lost in its own cleverness. On the whole, however, *Synchro Anarchy* is another essential listen in the long line of essential listens Voivod have delivered since 1983.

Examples: the title track and *Planet Eaters*. The former is a masterclass in the melodic intertwining of layers of 70s psychedelia and 80s metal with Denis 'Snake' Bélanger's nasal vocal delivery; the latter is a darkened rumbler reminiscent of *Dimension Hatross*'s cogent weirdness. Additionally, the Quebecois quartet continue to make room for exploration and advancement in how they inject *Mind Clock*'s downcast mood with Crumbsuckers-esque crossover and the self-empowerment message attached to the hard rockin' of *Sleeves Off*, which lyrically is the most bald-faced nod to non-fiction of the band's discography. Firsts continue to be unearthed in Voivod's universe, which should come as no surprise.

FOR FANS OF: **Hawkwind, Coroner, Crass**

CONNIE GORDON

SLOWBLEED
A Blazing Sun, The Fiery Dawn
CREATOR-DESTRUCTOR

Youthful Californians dive into the book of death metal

On first listen it's hard to escape the feeling that Slowbleed are just excited hardcore kids having a crack at death metal. But not only are the southern Californian mob knowledgeable of their craft, they play everything with such maniacal glee it's impossible not to be swept up in the slaughter. A huge swathe of the extreme metal landscape is covered, making the band's debut a fragmented affair, yet one that presents a delightful hunt for influences. While the beatdowns are delivered with belligerent nous, the sickening, cavernous atmosphere of *No Shepherd (Of Wolves)* and rusty edge of the riffs and leads of *Sangre* and *The Law (Atonement Through Blood)* leave an indelible mark.

FOR FANS OF: **Obituary, Gatecreeper, Creeping Death**

ADAM REES

SONATA ARCTICA
Acoustic Adventures Volume One
ATOMIC FIRE

Finnish power metallers accentuate their sentimentality

If you like the idea of Sonata Arctica rearranging some of their songs for acoustic guitars, pianos and banjos, *Acoustic Adventures* is the LP for you. If not, for God's sake stay away. These Finnish power metal melodicists were playing acoustic live sets years before lockdown made it fashionable, and their music has always had a soft, sentimental delicacy about it, so it makes more sense here than when Helloween tried it. The carefully chosen tracks are sympathetically rearranged with an artful flair that just about transcends the band's tendency towards mawkish gorgonzola, with flamboyant, tasteful solos arguably impacting strongest in this form. Radio 2 should be all over it.

FOR FANS OF: **Status Quo's Aquostic, Opeth, Mumford & Sons**

CHRIS CHANTLER

SUNCZAR
Bearer Of Light
ARGONAUTA

German stoner/sludge newbies tip their hats to the metal masters

Formed in 2019 just before the wheels came off the world, this German four-piece have spent most of their career holed up in their jam room refining their sludge and stoner-based sound. Faced with few touring options, they've returned to the studio to create the follow-up to their spellbinding 2020 EP, *The Unveiling*, and their debut full-length affirms Sunczar have plenty more tricks up their sleeve. Boasting stunning, Jack Kirby-inspired cover art, *Bearer Of Light* is a cathartic, head-cracking thrillride that leans heavily on their Down and Sabbath influences, and the super-catchy *Behold Your Savior*, which tips a cap to *Load*-era Metallica, will go down a storm live… eventually.

FOR FANS OF: **Down, The Sword, Goatsnake**

EDWIN McFEE

CATHERINE DESLAURIERS/PRESS

TERSIVEL
To The Orphic Void
UPRISING

Progressive Argentinian trio offer familiar sights to behold

This is only the third album Argentina's Tersivel have recorded since forming in 2004. It would be tempting to suggest it's because they've been waiting for Gojira to tell them what to sound like, as the spectre of the Frenchmen looms large over the six tracks here. There are numerous djenty death riffs of crushing elasticity, the excellent *Weeping Iron Tears* showcasing that particular element in its most successful guise, and a very Joe Duplantier-esque roar to the vocals. But if you are going to take inspiration from a band, then Gojira aren't a bad choice, and *To The Orphic Void* does have bits of its own personality: mainly the more classic prog leanings, wrapped up in the kind of material that you almost certainly loved on *From Mars To Sirus*.

FOR FANS OF: **Gojira, Opeth, Nero Di Marte**

STEPHEN HILL

TUSKAR
Matriarch
CHURCH ROAD

Freewheeling riff worship from that metal Mecca, Milton Keynes

As Milton Keynes remains in hypersleep until My Chemical Romance arrive, local duo Tuskar try their utmost to liven things up. Sure, their debut's title track suggests it's ostensibly a sludge album, but they flex like fuck. When they fancy, the panicky riffs are what you've begged Mastodon to bring back since *Blood Mountain*. For every sunken, doomy passage, you're smacked with extreme metal percussive blasts on *To The Sky* and *Into The Sea*. And, in a subgenre plagued with copycats and Matt Pike-alikes, Tyler Hodges' screams are *his*. Throughout *Matriarch*'s centrepiece, *Shame*, he's giving it the heart-on-sleeve treatment you'd expect from YOB. *Halcyon Gilt* pulls similar tricks, evoking melancholy, explosive, and kinda fun vibes in equal measure. 'Highly anticipated debut' is often code for 'overhyped toss'. Not here. As first attempts go, this is up there with Conjurer's *Mire*.

FOR FANS OF: **YOB, Conjurer, Boss Keloid**

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

WILDERUN
Epigone
CENTURY MEDIA

US prog metallers take a half-step back from classical melodrama

These Boston boys pinched progressive death metal by the ear and dragged it to the opera on their last album, *Veil Of Imagination*. What resulted was the most fearless, bombastic and cohesive thing to come from the genre since Opeth went soft, crammed to the rafters with choirs and strings. *Epigone* is its predecessor's shyer, younger sibling. Opener *Exhaler* is quiet yet gorgeously sung folk and *Woolgatherer*, despite some powerful extreme metal puffs, takes 12 minutes to rocket to the blastbeating pageantry we were bombarded with last time. The album's four-part closer, *Distraction*, is a more theatrical finale. Although it only strikes orchestral exuberance at its climax, it's a parade of dramatically bullheaded riffs throughout. As a result, *Epigone* is a devolution for this quartet, but by no means should it mark curtains down for their career.

FOR FANS OF: **Wintersun, Opeth, Haken**

MATT MILLS

WOLFBASTARD
Hammer The Bastards
CLOBBER

Blackened crust ruffians discharge their wrecking brawl

With a moniker like Wolfbastard, an album called *Hammer The Bastards* and songtitle elegance like *Nun Krüsher, Buckfast Blasphemies* and *Morbid Fucking Hell*, this trio splay assumptions all over the bar top. It's not at all surprising these Mancunian miscreants nab cues from that early 80s era when the NWOBHM was cohabiting with punk's increasing virulency while simultaneously making way for emerging heavier forms. Neither is it surprising how prominently the d-beat features here. What is surprising is just how much of Tank's Algy Ward comes through in Si Fox's booming bass and melodic roar. It's also surprising to note that *Hammer The Bastards* wasn't recorded live amid a particularly nasty pub brawl because it sure as heck sounds like 13 songs of flying pint glasses, weaponised snooker cues and chairs being shattered over heads.

FOR FANS OF: **Discharge, Darkthrone, Motörhead**

CONNIE GORDON

Manuel Gagneux doesn't know what a neutral zone is

ZEAL & ARDOR
Zeal & Ardor
MVKA

Switzerland's genre-mashing maestro goes the extra mile

'BLACK METAL MEETS black spiritual music.' Bottle it, flog it for all it's worth. When Zeal & Ardor's debut, *Devil Is Fine*, slithered into 2017's end-of-year lists, we'd heard nothing like it: centuries-old slave chants blasphemed by black metal tremolo, bubbling electronica, dusty blues, Gothenburg melodies, and baroque Nick Cave-iness. Coining the idea of African American slaves praising Satan rather than God, Zeal & Ardor's Manuel Gagneux established his 'thing'. *Stranger Fruit* stretched that concept further in 2018, while 2020's more immediate *Wake Of A Nation* EP tackled current affairs, galvanised by George Floyd's murder. Does album number three have anything left to *do*?

Course it does. It has more ideas than will.i.am drunk-texting Elon Musk. More twists than M. Night Shyamalan shagging a rollercoaster. But the difference is, Manuel knows what he's doing. *Zeal & Ardor* is as cohesive as it is contrary, the title track's industrial Godflesh drone set against silken, Satanic litanies. Album closer, *A-H-I-L*, is nearer to a Jim Williams horror score than it is to anything written by church-burning Norwegians.

Between those extremes, Manuel goes toe-to-toe with everyone. *Emersion* visits that sunshiny post-black metal Møl have cornered the market on, *Götterdämmerung* injects soul and ghoulish choirs into mid-2000s Dimmu Borgir stomp, while *J-M-B* buzzes like a necro Ministry backed by… honky tonk piano? It's all so propulsive, but it's ridiculously accessible and nothing's a footnote. Manuel's gorgeous vocal timbre is never compromised, lending the record an aged quality – not least on *Golden Liar*'s Spaghetti Western-by-way-of-John Legend acoustica.

We're told everything's been done before. Digital cartoon monkeys are the pinnacle of creativity. *The Simpsons* is still going. Originality is a scant currency, and Manuel's pockets are full. *Devil Is Fine* dreamt a new world, *Stranger Fruit* started the journey, but *Zeal & Ardor* cast its anchor and bought a house there. We're just lucky to be invited.

FOR FANS OF: **Sigh, Batushka, Mamaleek**

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

PRESS

LIVE REVIEWS

METALLICA

CHASE CENTER, SAN FRANCISCO

Heavy metal overlords dig deep for their 40th anniversary homecoming

James Hetfield likes the look of Metallica's most devoted fans

FOR ALL THE pageantry and bombast we've come to expect from Metallica, there is something incredibly candid and intimate about their 40th Anniversary celebrations. Effectively taking over their old stomping ground of San Francisco, fans were given the opportunity to partake in everything from tastings of Blackened whiskey to screenings of past concert videos, live Q&As and even attending the premiere of the new *Matrix*, capped off with two special live performances at the 18,000-capacity Chase Center.

Those unable to make the coveted trip were offered some solace at least, able to tune in and watch the band's performances via Amazon Prime over the Christmas period – truly a thing to incite goodwill amongst all men. The streams themselves are two-thirds concert video, with a smattering of documentary-style nostalgia sprinkled in – including spoken-word intros from Tom Morello and Jason Momoa over *The Ecstasy Of Gold* – to truly hone-in on why Metallica have been so important for the last four decades.

Be under no illusion: this is a Metallica show, no two ways about it. Blasts of pyro punctuate the set and the multi-screen set-up above the band boasts the stunning, occasionally mind-warping visuals familiar to anyone who caught the band on their Hardwired tour. But for all those arena-sized metal trappings, the camerawork ensures that the focus always remains on the four men onstage and their not-inconsiderable arsenal of heavy metal anthems.

And *what* anthems. Spread across two nights with different setlists for each, Metallica pull from each of their studio albums chronologically (reverse order for the second night), offering up a cornucopia of rarities over the weekend. *Reload*'s *Fixxxer* makes its live debut, while the likes of *I Disappear, Bleeding Me, The Shortest Straw* and *Trapped Under Ice* appear for the first time in years – further proof for just how insanely stacked Metallica's discography is that such brilliant songs can be so regularly omitted from setlists.

Surprisingly, it's the second night that feels the freshest and most exciting. While there's an undeniable thrill to seeing Metallica tear straight out the gates on night one with *Hit The Lights* into *Creeping Death*, there is also a sense of expectancy and familiarity that inevitably throws up comparisons to *Cunning Stunts, Live Shit: Binge & Purge* or countless other times you'll have seen those songs over the decades. By comparison, night two's opening run of *Hardwired, Death Magnetic* and even *St. Anger*-era material sees Metallica sink their teeth into proceedings with a vigour and vitality that brings their full heft to the fore, steadily building until we reach an unbelievable closing run of *Unforgiven, Enter Sandman, Harvester Of Sorrow, Master Of Puppets, Fade To Black, Whiplash* and finally *Seek & Destroy.*

Befitting Metallica's status as a globe-conquering band, fans from all over the world represent across the two livestreams and the sense of pure adulation and devotion is palpable. The singalong for *The Memory Remains* stands as one of the stream's most enviable moments, tinged with a real 'wish you were there' electricity. "You want us to play for another 40 years!" James quips at the end of the first night, fans still howling for more even after two hours of unstoppable metal brilliance.

Even with all the idolatry heaped at their feet, this just might be the most relaxed we have ever seen Metallica onstage. They aren't playing up to their rock star status – in fact, quite the contrary. Perhaps it's the knowledge the band are playing to a crowd of hardcore devotees (tickets available only via a lottery through Metallica's fanclub), perhaps it's the fact this show is a hometown gig (as Lars puts it, "There's no other place on this fuckin' planet I would rather be celebrating 40 years"), but Hetfield and co address the crowd with the ease and intimacy you'd expect of a small-scale local gig, cracking jokes and acknowledging fans throughout the set as if they've known each other forever.

And in a way, they have. After all, Metallica has always been the story of four heavy metal-loving guys celebrating the music they loved, meaning they know *exactly* what it means for fans to see their idols up close and personal, bridging the physical gap inherent to an arena by creating the kind of close-knit atmosphere of a club. The faces may have changed over the past 40 years, but that love has always abided, reiterating that above all else Metallica are – and always have been – lifelong music fans.

From AC/DC's *It's A Long Way To The Top* playing over the PA accompanied by pictures from the band's early days to on-screen monologues about their favourite covers to play – many of which elicit massive cheers from the crowd, making you wonder how great a *Garage Inc.* set would be – Metallica fly their colours proudly across the two streams. 2021 may have been filled with celebrations for Metallica, but their San Francisco takeover brings focus back where it belongs – to one of the most illustrious heavy metal arsenals the world has ever seen.

RICH HOBSON

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY X4

Metallica's stage production leaves other bands in the shade

Kirk Hammett takes lead in flying the colours

Lars Ulrich: still Metallica's Energy Bunny

POWERWOLF

PRIVATE VENUE, GERMANY

Saarbrücken's lupe-y power metallers stream a monumental spectacle

TWO YEARS INTO the pandemic and we've seen all manner of livestreams, from fuzzy footage shot in basements to over-the-top performances that erupt with fire and theatrics. If you're familiar with German power metal maniacs Powerwolf, it won't take long to guess which category they fall under.

If there was a prize for the most 'extra' band in metal, Powerwolf would be top dog. The drama is always sky-high with band leader Matthew Greywolf and his gang of corsepainted, self-described 'wolves': from their grandiose, fist-pumping power metal to their live shows, dubbed 'metal masses', which burst with energy, pyro, and include more than a few wind machines. The fact that they have unashamedly billed this, their first ever livestream, as The Monumental Mass: A Cinematic Metal Event, says it all – it's time to strap yourself in for a spectacle.

Given Powerwolf's penchant for extravagant themes and concepts in their lyrics – like myths and folklore involving vampires and werewolves, not to mention the odd over-the-top biblical romp – it's no surprise that the Monumental Mass has a narrative story that plays out in between the songs. This story is set within the shadowy halls of a monastery and split into four chapters: Temptation, Sin, Confession and Forgiveness. If we're being totally honest, it's not *entirely* clear what this story actually is – Young monk discovers the wonders of Powerwolf? Naughty nuns get to shake off their habits? – but who cares; once the performance gets going, there's so much to watch that you won't give two hoots about a plot.

After a dramatic intro that includes a build-up of orchestral music, monks gliding through grey monastery halls and the members of Powerwolf striding seriously through said monastery brandishing lit staffs, we're soon plunged into the first performance of new track *Faster Than The Flame*. Part of Powerwolf's drama lies in their extreme contrasts – flitting from stony-faced to over-the-top elation. As soon as they take to the stage, the sombre faces are gone and replaced by mega-grins as the bandmembers leap, bound and ham it up across a stage that bursts with flames. So far, so Powerwolf. But with the show being virtual this time, the special effects are out in full force – the sky above the stage cracks with lightning, and the backdrop looks as though they're playing inside a huge church. Throughout the livestream this backdrop changes: from different settings – such as outside in a stormy graveyard, or inside an ornate church – to showing huge portraits of the likes of Jesus, various saints and, of course, the Powerwolf wolf himself, decked out in a Pope's hat. The stage itself also changes throughout the show, at numerous points taking the shape of a huge cross.

Attila Dorn chalks up another victory

There are also a number of special guests – for *Venom Of Venus*, two figures wearing gold masks and wings set on fire stride out onto the stage, while a bunch of monks show up sporadically throughout the show. And then of course, there are the nuns. They first appear during *Demons Are A Girl's Best Friend*, and it isn't long before they've yanked off their habits to reveal black lingerie and harnesses, before going to writhe around frontman Attila. In this day and age, such a display feels cringe at best, and seriously misplaced at worst. These women reappear throughout the performance, alternating between nun garb and various costumes, like sexy skeleton suits – looking like they've raided the ASOS Halloween bin.

It's a hefty setlist, where Powerwolf play five tracks from new album *Call Of The Wild*, as well as all the favourites, from *We Drink Your Blood* to *Resurrection By Erection*. During the latter, all the nuns congregate around the stage, reaching up to Attila and holding up crosses as though he is some sort of god or preacher. The inclusion of ballad *Where The Wild Wolves Have Gone* – where Falk plays a flaming organ and snow appears to fall softly over the stage – halts the pace and reminds us of how similar the rest of Powerwolf's songs all sound: a fact that's easily overshadowed tonight by the visual feast on display. But there's no denying that Powerwolf are masters of their craft. And when the show ends, and the masks slip as the bandmembers ecstatically hug each other, grinning and acting silly, it's clear – and touching – to know that they are loving this whole ridiculous charade just as much as we are.

HANNAH MAY KILROY

CHRISTIAN RIPKENS

By the time you get to the Phoenix, the drugs will have kicked in

Powerwolf's theatrial extravaganza, aka *Bats*

You wait ages for a succubus...

Powerwolf induce Mass hysteria

The monastery-sacking scene isn't entirely historically accurate

TRIVIUM

THE HANGAR, FLORIDA

Florida's metal masters look back from a high vantage point

OVER THE LAST two years, Trivium have become pretty good at this streaming lark, providing a steady flow of online performances that have been a lifeline for many fans during the pandemic. Following a stream the previous week that saw the Floridans play fan favourite *In Waves* in full, and a face-melting three-song warm-up from New Jersey deathcore innovators Fit For An Autopsy, this time the focus falls on Trivium's two recent albums, 2020's *What The Dead Men Say* and 2021's *In The Court Of The Dragon* – the two records that have pushed them, once again, to the very forefront of modern metal. It's the closest many of us are going to get to seeing these songs live for the foreseeable, given the band have just postponed their European tour dates to 2023.

As vocalist Matt Heafy explains, the band wanted to craft a setlist of songs fans would "least expect", eschewing obvious big hitters like *Feast Of Fire* and *Catastrophist* for a muscular *Fall Into Your Hands* and incendiary *Bending The Arc To Fear*. And unlike their 2020 global streaming event, A Light Or A Distant Mirror, which saw them splurge on production, tonight they're flanked by an unfussy backdrop, and filmed from their practice space at their ex-airplane hangar HQ. As such, it feels intimate, like watching a tightly honed practice session.

The real takeaway from tonight, though, is a reminder of just how impressive a tear Trivium are on at the moment if these are the songs relegated to the sidelines. The surgically precise *Defiant* gleams like a shot of adrenaline. *Amongst The Shadows & The Stones* is as complex as it is unabashedly anthemic. And stone-cold killer *Like A Sword Over Damocles* should be promoted to setlist mainstay with immediate effect. It only makes the wait for 2023 seem all the longer.

DANNII LEIVERS

PRESS

Enslaved imagine if the Vikings discovered Haight-Ashbury

KOLIBRI MEDIA/PRESS

ENSLAVED

PRIVATE VENUE, BJØRNAFJORDEN, NORWAY

Norwegian prog metal voyagers enter otherworldly dimensions

IN AN INTERVIEW directly preceding Enslaved's fifth livestream, bassist/vocalist Grutle Kjellson states, "Conformity has never been our thing." That's an understatement. Over the course of a 30-year career, the Bergen masterminds have bent black metal on their knee, snapped it like plywood and reassembled it using parts of prog, folk, krautrock and acid rock. The Otherworldly Big Band Experience honours such transcendence with suitable ambition. For one night only, experimental rockers Shaman Elephant expand Enslaved's ranks. The nine-piece proceed to play a rarities set in front of a backdrop of eye-popping special effects.

The stream commences with an aptly celestial vibe, picking up where the space rock of October's *Caravans To The Outer Worlds* EP left off. The tight camerawork, long fades and soft focus make guitar strings look like shining gadgets from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Spotlights gleam in the surrounding blackness like stars. *Ruun II: The Epitaph* proves the ideal soundtrack; its jangling acoustic guitars and echoing keyboards, as well as Grutle's lingering cleans, add a planet's worth of sci-fi mysticism.

Bounded By Allegiance swaps the rocket for a longship, rediscovering the Norse prog metal of 2004's *Isa*. Any qualms that tonight's line-up could prove needlessly large are thrown overboard when its seven singers hum folk melodies with the bliss of a choir. Even more awe-inspiring are the war chants that incite *Havenless*; finally, they're as imposing and all-consuming as they were when howling out of *Below The Lights* 19 years ago.

Meanwhile, *Sequence* – a stomper interrupted by an ethereal post-rock mid-section – may herald the most striking visuals of the stream. During a tranquil vocal serenade from Grutle, drummer Iver Sandøy, keyboardist Håkon Vinje and Shaman Elephant's Jard Hole, the four appear on the backdrop in an obvious echo of *Bohemian Rhapsody*. However, it faces stiff competition throughout. Godlike eyes stalk guitarist Arve Isdal during one of his solos and *Slaget I Skogen Bortenfor* matches blasts of second-wave black metal with shots of Viking battles and exploding rubble.

A cover of Scandinavian synthpop pair Röyksopp's *What Else Is There?* segues into *Hiindsiight* for a multifaceted finale. The band at their most concise and melodic are juxtaposed by a death/doom behemoth so heavy that it causes the stone projections behind them to crumble into kaleidoscopic psychedelia. It's the perfect end to a stream that set out to celebrate three decades of eclecticism.

MATT MILLS

Deafheaven have lost none of their flare

Kerry McCoy: happy to leave his black metal past behind

Shiv Mehra offers a rhapsody in blue

DEAFHEAVEN

RIVERWOOD ART STUDIO, LOS ANGELES

Post-black scene-leaders commemorate their new era

THE GENRE-SMASHING COLLECTIVE known as Deafheaven have set up at Riverwood Art Studio in Los Angeles to record a live performance of their polarising new release, *Infinite Granite*. Not everybody appreciated the band's directional shift away from their blackgaze roots and towards the poppy, synth-driven atmospherics of post-rock. Most, however, seemed to applaud the album's dreamy grandeur and it easily claimed a spot in *Hammer*'s 2021 Top 50 Critics' Poll.

If Deafheaven's first pandemic studio set, 2020's 10 Years Gone, celebrated the critical and popular successes of their first decade together, then the Riverwood Arts session signals the dawn of a new era. Snugly ensconced in the studio with a few glowing yellow lights and some psychedelic strobe patterns, the band play through the entire album in order, deviating little from the original recordings. And yet the performance is revelatory in showcasing just how little studio trickery is needed to translate the new songs live. *In Blur* and *Great Mass Of Color* distil shimmering riffs, skittering tempos and serpentine basslines into arresting soundscapes that dovetail seamlessly into George Clarke's clean, confident vocals. Think Morrissey belting through *OK, Computer.*

There is, nonetheless, a stripped-down intimacy underpinning the set. The gauzy atmospherics of *Lament For Wasps* build to a euphoric climax of trippy synths and surging post-rock guitars. And while the performance marks a broad departure from their early days, Deafheaven haven't abandoned the hardened aggression that invested *Sunbather* with its bruising vitality. Clarke's coarse, blackened shrieks on *Villain* and *Mombasa* hit even harder when contrasted against the set's otherwise blissful textures.

Fans who missed the performance might unfortunately be out of luck; the pre-recorded stream was made available for just 24 hours following its release. Given the polished production and the subdued strength of the performance, we hope this set finds a permanent release at some point in the near future.

JOE DALY

PRESS

ORANGE GOBLIN

KING CREATURE/URNE

THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

The UK's prime rabble-rousers celebrate a hard-won homecoming

THERE ARE SUBATOMIC particles that have proved more stable than Orange Goblin's 25th anniversary celebrations. After cancellations, reappearances as a not-ideal socially distanced event and a cathartic Damnation appearance, the UK's otherwise most reliable metal band are still battling through the Covid headwinds to finally mark a UK tour to honour their achievement. It culminates in two nights at their spiritual home, The Underworld, and if not every ticket-holder has proved willing to take their chances against Omicron, the atmosphere is everything you'd expect: bawdy, exultant, all as one.

First night openers **URNE** (absent on the second night down to you-know-what) have an arsenal of charged, agile riffs and an ability to switch into emotive expanses, but they have yet to transform their down-to-earth demeanour into something that fully projects what they're capable of live. **KING CREATURE**'s frontman has a bordering-on-cocky confidence, a powerful voice, and fronts a band whose route one blues-infused hard rock attempts Trivium-level anthems, but lack any kind of individual filter that might take them beyond Battle Of The Bands league.

Roaming across their first five, largely more psychedelic albums on night one, **ORANGE GOBLIN** offer proof once more how transformative a bit of swing, groove and the friction of lived experience can be. The opening *Scorpionica* is an immediate rallying cry, with riffs scrambling up a ladder to the stars, Joe Hoare's liquid leads and a recently reconfigured rhythm section clicking into delirium-inducing gear as bassist Harry Armstrong trades banter with the crowd and a clearly emotional and defiant Ben Ward. *Saruman's Wish* from the debut, *Frequencies From Planet Ten*, pulls greasy, wah-wah-stretched, Sabbathian biker rock from its lush, sensual intro, the indomitable *Some You Win, Some You Lose* takes on an added, timely urgency, everyone singing the words back as if it were a national anthem, and *Made Of Rats*'s lurch-inducing groove turns into a desert odyssey.

The first night acts as a salutary reminder of how deep Orange Goblin's DNA runs, how far it digs back into rock and blues lore and resurfaces it as something molten and thrillingly alive. Night two also makes it clear that as much as Goblin have drawn from Sabbath's well, the spirit of Motörhead is an equal, animating presence, acknowledged by Ben himself as he leads the crowd in raucous tribute. From *Sons Of Salem* through *The Fog* to a closing fuel-injected *Red Tide Rising*, Goblin are a necessary binding force and an ever-replenished thrill ride that leaves you giddy. The perfect gateway drug.

JONATHAN SELZER

Orange Goblin's Ben Ward: happy to stick to Covid protocol

TINA KORHONEN

FIVE MINUTES WITH

HENRY DE JONG

ALIEN WEAPONRY

The Alien Weaponry drummer talks sleazy gigs, busted digits and overly enthusiastic fans

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

Word has it the first show Alien Weaponry ever played was in a red light district…
"Yeah, we've got this place called K Road in Auckland, which is mostly bars, strip clubs and weed shops. The whole stretch is sketchy as fuck and we were invited to play a dive bar by a guy who told us we'd be playing an afterparty for Steve Vai… needless to say, he didn't show up! We ended up playing the same three or four songs for about 90 minutes to an audience of two people, but we got paid $50, so that was good at least!"

And how old were you at that point?
"I would've been… 12, maybe? Lewis [de Jong, vocals] and Ethan [Trembath, ex-bassist] would have been 10. It definitely taught us we needed to play more gigs if we ever hoped to get anywhere, at least."

It's a pretty big jump going from that to touring overseas with Gojira…
"It's been incredible being out with those guys. It was really surreal when we played Richmond, because Randy Blythe from Lamb Of God came out to the show too. It was so great just to hang out with him again – we'd not seen him in a couple years and we're such huge fans, so its mad to us to even have those kinds of relationships with our idols."

What was the maddest show of the tour?
"The last show we played was in Colorado and was a headline show. We weren't expecting too many people to turn up, but next thing we knew, people were cramming themselves in to the point where it was like a solid wall of meat in front of the stage. And then they started going crazy throughout the whole show. I've not seen energy like that in a good while, it was nuts."

"I BROKE THE TOP OF MY FINGER OFF ONCE PLAYING FOOTBALL"

You earned a pretty dedicated following early on. Have you met any superfans yet?
"There was a really tiny, middle-aged Asian lady in a corset and high heels who came sprinting up to me after one of our shows on the recent tour screaming 'MY SQUISHY BOY!' and got very touchy. I didn't know what to do and when I looked around I could see everyone on the tour bus watching me through the window, laughing their fucking arses off. I don't know if that counts, but she was definitely… enthusiastic."

Who is the most famous or surprising fan you have made so far?
"It was wild to me when Alex Bent of Trivium came up to say he loves our stuff and that he listens to us with his daughter. Mario [Duplantier] has been super-supportive too – they actually approached us at Chicago Open Air to say how much they loved our music. I couldn't believe it was them saying that to us, you know? Gene Hoglan was a really big one for me too, I love so much of his work. I think we're really lucky in metal that it's a very tight community and everyone is really supportive. The only massive one left for me now is Metallica – without them I don't think we'd be doing this and we can dream someday of playing with them whenever they next come out to New Zealand."

You cancelled a show after your brother Lewis broke his thumb riding a scooter last year. What's the stupidest injury you've ever got?
"I broke the top of my finger off once playing football. I also bent my leg completely sideways. There was an audible pop when it happened and that was fun to recover from – I had to play shows with my leg in a brace right before I got surgery. So far as dumbest though, I'd say probably breaking my knuckle on my mate's head during an argument. Lesson learned: don't punch your mates."

Most people's perceptions of New Zealand as a country will come from TV or movies – so is it more *Braindead* or *Lord Of The Rings*?
"I tell you what, *Braindead* is a really good representation for smalltown New Zealand. Minus the zombies and heavy gore of course, but it really is!"

ALIEN WEAPONRY TOUR THE UK WITH GOJIRA IN MARCH

RANDY: TRAVIS SHINN/PRESS OTHERS: PRESS

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